

12 3 09 Holidays and Anniversaries: Triggers for Emotions and Healing

The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. You may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.

Dear Ted,

I feel this anxiety of the holidays as December approaches. I just completed Thanksgiving and it was a hard swallow. These two months of holiday exposure are difficult. Last month was the first anniversary of my wife's death. I survived the anniversary and I immediately start to dread the upcoming holidays. Am I overreacting, is this okay? Sincerely, David

Dear David,

Anniversaries are such a difficult time and can bring back so many memories (happy and sad) and your emotional and physical system can get worn down. The anniversary comes and you work with that day and then quite often you become drained from the anticipation of the date and the experience of the actual anniversary. It is almost like you have an emotional hangover from the experience and yet while drained, you are reminded that another type of anniversary is on its way, called the holidays. This is difficult due to expectations by society, advertisements, marketing and possibly you and family that this time is supposed to be full of cheer and joy. This expectation can be so daunting that it feels as if you are in a dark cloud. As time passes and you heal from your losses, you will also start to learn that you are surviving. You are able to survive the anniversaries as your internal world starts to have a different experience on that day. In this scenario, your anniversary will slowly not be as emotionally charged and may become more of a day of remembrance, honoring and healing rather than trauma and pain. This, in return, will give you more energy to enter into the holidays knowing that they too, will decrease in their intensity as emotional storms pass and you have more emotional shelter.

It is so strange how a loss can feel like it happened two minutes ago, years ago, or possibly another lifetime. Anniversaries have a tendency of having past experiences feel like the here and now. This is normal and it is as if your psyche does not have a clock or calendar and the emotions triggered from loss come flooding in as if it happened that day. Many people do not understand this and may have expectations that you should "be over it". Honoring your feelings and allowing happiness to be the ability to walk with joy and sorrow will give you permission to move through the holidays with authenticity. Giving yourself permission to feel and heal is a true gift. In grief there is no right or wrong, there is only natural healing. The more this can be done consciously, the less anniversaries and holidays will deplete your soul. I wish you well as you give yourself permission to ride the storm of emotions while navigating through the societal traps of the marketing of holidays. Until next week, take care.

Golden Willow Retreat is a nonprofit organization focused on emotional healing. Please direct questions to Ted Wiard, LPCC, CGC, founder of Golden Willow Retreat and clinical supervisor for Teambuilders Counseling at (575) 776-2024 or GWR@newmex.com