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Spirituality in Bereavement Calls for Both Tradition and Change

Religious holidays can be particularly challenging when you are grieving the loss of a loved one. Even months in advance, rituals and memories of the past as well as the weight of expectations can lead to both fear and anxiety. The ability to find balance between upholding tradition and allowing for change is key to coping through these difficult times.

Throughout the year, Hospice of Palm Beach County's John J. Brogan Bereavement Center enhances their offerings of individual and support group counseling with a variety of

programs geared toward bereaved families. In order to acknowledge challenges faced during religious holidays, two programs are facilitated in the fall. "Coping with the Jewish Holidays," focuses on the Jewish High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and "Coping with the Holidays," held at a later date, features Thanksgiving, Christmas and Chanukah.

Religion can provide a healing source of support, strength and hope for individuals looking for the courage to take tough steps forward. For some, attending a holiday service, group, ceremony or bible study can be an integral part of coping with a religious holiday spent without a loved one. Expressing faith and spirituality can also help alleviate pervasive loneliness and meet the need for community and belonging often yearned for by the bereaved.

Yet, for some coping with grief, the tradition of attending religious services or the expectation of upholding rituals can feel overwhelming and anxiety provoking. Convincing oneself that there is a right and wrong way to spend the holiday can result in a great deal of pressure to do that which may feel like too much too soon.

One of the best ways to manage and be self protective through holiday time is to grant oneself permission to prioritize, simplify and make modifications to longstanding traditions. Change need not be permanent but allowing for it enables the bereaved to honor where they are, help others to understand what they need, and set reasonable expectations regarding what they feel able to do. Ultimately, grief is a life long journey and making self care an important part of one's healing helps to enhance coping not only during the holidays but also every day in between.

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