

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

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TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

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Navigating Conversations around Grief and the Holidays

Rachel Kodanaz ★ TAPS Advisory Board



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Most conversations between two or more people are casual and engaged to exchange ideas, thoughts, or emotions. In most cases, discussions are straightforward and timely—based on current events, shared experiences, or future planning. However, navigating, and often tiptoeing, around conversations during the holiday season is essential to remain conscientious of those grieving the loss of a loved one and being sensitive to their needs.

Caring Intentions of Family and Friends

Embracing and celebrating the holiday season following a loss can be a bit overwhelming. While you may want to engage in some planned activities, the people around you may push to engage you in festivities more than you would like. Their actions are from a place of caring, with the ultimate desire to be inclusive. Although, at times, their eagerness to help may cause them to stumble in conversation, try to embrace their enthusiasm. There is a natural tendency to shy away from activity or interaction during the holidays as a grieving individual. That's because these times magnify the emptiness and sadness of loss, resulting in loneliness and isolation. Regardless of the reason, your friends and family members struggle to interact and often make inappropriate comments or tend to minimize your loss in hopes of easing the pain.

Celebrate the Holidays and Honor Your Grief

When navigating conversations around grief and the holidays, it's not about what others say but how you react to what others say. Of course, people mean well, especially your family and friends, but

how you interpret their comments might create an emotional reaction.

The holiday season is a time of celebration, family gatherings, sharing, and spending time with others. Those grieving often have to guide a conversation to balance the joy of being with others with the sadness of a loss. By directing the conversation, you can be true to your own needs rather than those of the people around you. Be sure to prepare yourself for emotional setbacks—for becoming defensive with those you feel are less sensitive to your situation. Find the balance of old and new by sticking to what works best for you. Be inclusive by sharing stories of your loved ones, preparing their favorite foods, and creating new memories.

Protect Yourself and Your Feelings

Most importantly, be sure to navigate the conversations by allowing yourself to feel your emotions; and try not to cover up or stifle how you feel to please others, whether in person or at virtual engagements. Be sure to define what is best for you by planning and communicating your plans well in advance. Focus on what you have control over rather than being hurt or emotionally displaced when caught off guard. Honor the memories of your loved ones by including them in festivities in any manner you feel comfortable. Set boundaries and communicate with your family how much time you want to be together and the details of gatherings. Be sure to prepare yourself for a range of emotions—the most straightforward comments can set off an array of sadness, guilt, loneliness, and resentment.

Always remember, the most important person is YOU, so take care of yourself first. Enjoy the holiday season!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



rachelkodanaz.com

Rachel Kodanaz is a heart-minded professional specializing in current and relevant approaches to support individuals and workplaces following a loss or trauma. A TAPS Advisory Board Member, Rachel is also a seasoned keynote speaker and best-selling author.

Visit Rachel's website to find her published books, offering a wealth of knowledge, inspiration, and practical advice for those who have lost a loved one or are supporting someone who has lost a loved one.



*TAPS Webinar Hosted
by Rachel Kodanaz*

Watch Rachel's webinar, Navigating Conversations around Grief and the Holidays, hosted by the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® to learn strategies and share ideas about how to find meaningful ways to celebrate the holidays and honor your grief while still protecting yourself and your feelings.