If you are arranging care for yourself or a loved one, or seeking home health resources in southeastern Massachusetts, then Community VNA, located in Attleboro, MA is ready to help. Our broad spectrum of services includes certified home health, nursing and rehabilitative care, hospice and palliative care, privately funded medical and non-medical personal care, and adult day health services.

Since 1911, our nurses, rehabilitation therapists, home care aides, housekeepers and home companions have cared for adults and seniors in their private homes, assisted living and long term care residences. State of the art home telemonitoring and an in-home personal emergency response system are just some of the supportive services that we can provide as part of our patient-focused care.

Community VNA is ready to help in so many ways:
• Home Health Care
• Hospice and Palliative Care
• Private Care
• Adult Day Health Care
• Community Wellness
• Lifeline Medical Alert Services

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Community VNA
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www.communityvna.com

This booklet was adapted from various sources by Community VNA.
Less and Special Times

Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries - for most people just thinking about these special days spent with family and friends can bring back a flood of happy memories. However, for others, happy memories are dulled by the pain and sorrow of experiencing these celebrations without a loved one who has died.

Special times are extremely difficult for those who have experienced the death of a loved one, especially during the first year after the death. At a time when everyone is supposed to be happy and enjoying themselves, the bereaved can feel sad, lonely and depressed.

It seems everywhere you turn there is something to break your heart a little more. Stores are decorated with the symbols of the holiday. Television and radio abound with stories and songs of togetherness, love and sharing. Everyone you meet asks that question you dread hearing, “What are you doing for the holidays?” They cannot seem to wait for that special day to arrive. You can’t wait for it to be over.

The holidays and special times do not necessarily have to be entirely sad. There are ways to help you cope with your grief during this time. This booklet explains some of the steps you can take to help you get through these difficult times.

Remember . . .

there is no single script on how to cope best with holidays and special times – only that we need to listen inwardly to what is best for us.

Thank you for sharing this journey with us . . .

Community VNA Hospice Care is a leader in adult and children’s grief support programs, healing through the arts workshops and assistance in end of life matters.

The following programs are free and open to the public.

**Kids’ Club** - For children ages 5-13 dealing with grief; held four times a year on Saturdays. Provides supportive creative atmosphere to express feelings.

**Grief Support Group** - First Monday of the month for adults experiencing loss and grief. Meetings provide sharing and support.

**Periodic Educational Programs** - Focusing on loss, healing and surviving the death of a loved one.

**Healing Through the Arts** - a creative workshop presented annually for adults dealing with loss, physical and emotional pain, and life transitions.

To learn more, please call us at 508-222-0118 or visit us online at www.communityvna.com.
Helping Children Grieve

Be prepared for any type of response especially from adolescents. For teenagers, the death of a loved one during this time of their life is very difficult. Be patient even if they are being hurtful or thoughtless.

Children and teens are often given the message to be “strong” to protect a grieving parent. Help to facilitate their grief because they need to grieve, too.

On the holiday or special time itself, don’t expect the children to spend the entire day with you. They may want to visit a friend. Children need the support and security of hanging out with their friends. Children tend to grieve in spurts.

Activities for Children

Many families have found that creating a special activity for the children to participate in can be meaningful and comforting to them. Although adults can have input and give guidance, the children should decide what they would like to do.

Some suggestions that have proven helpful to others are:

- Have the child help bake cookies for a nursing home or a group that had meaning to the deceased.
- Donate money to a charity that was significant to the deceased and, have the child write a note explaining that the gift is a memorial and add something personal about the deceased.

Planning Ahead

It is important to bring some forethought to the challenges you may encounter. Many people who are grieving feel that they would like to just go to sleep and wake up when the holidays or special times are over. Instead, you can choose to be proactive and plan ahead.

Some things to consider are:

- What to do about traditions – forget them for this year, try them, or develop new ones?
- Do I accept or decline party and dinner invitations?
- What would be the best for me?
- What would be best for the children?
- Should a visit be made to the cemetery that day?
- What about cooking and baking?
- Should the house be decorated?
- How will I ever get out of bed that morning?

Even though you may experience some emotional pain during the planning, it is helpful to do this. You will find that when the special time actually arrives, it is likely to be less painful than you anticipated.

Do not let these decisions make you feel worse. Choose to deal with a few at a time, so as not to overwhelm yourself. Find a friend or friends to help you through.
Taking Care of Yourself

Take care of yourself physically. A grieving body is more susceptible to illness and needs proper nourishment and rest.

**Get adequate rest.** Experiencing the death of a loved one requires a great deal of physical and emotional strength. Your body and mind need rest to recuperate.

**Take a walk.** Exercise reduces stress and can increase your sense of well being. If you are not presently exercising, don’t overdo it. Start by simply walking. As you gain strength and stamina, increase your speed and distance.

**Eat a properly balanced diet.** Your body needs the strength and energy it will get from eating properly. Fight the tendency to rely on junk food because it’s faster, easier and less of a hassle.

**Limit the use of drugs or alcohol.** Excessive use of drugs or alcohol will only postpone the painful feelings, not eliminate them. A mild sedative or anti-anxiety medications prescribed by a physician can even out your feelings and help you deal with your loss. Just do not overdo them as a way to completely bury your pain.

**Communicate with others.** If other family members are also grieving, it may be necessary to discuss what your needs are and determine if they coincide or conflict with their needs. It is important to be honest about your feelings and what you want. Be flexible, so that a meaningful compromise can be worked out which will help everyone involved.

Memorialize your loved one in a way that is meaningful to you. Choosing an activity that your loved one would have approved of can make it even more meaningful. An activity that the entire family can participate in can strengthen the bonds of togetherness and sharing. However, it is also appropriate for individual family members to create a memorial activity that is personal and private – something that is between just them and the deceased.

Here are some suggestions:

- Purchase a small evergreen tree from a nursery, decorate it and replant it after the holiday.
- Light special memorial candles each day during the holidays or use one larger candle and light it each day.
- Take time with the family to share memories of your deceased loved one.
- Offer a dinner prayer or toast to your loved one.
- Purchase a gift for your loved one, then donate it.
- Give money to a charity in the deceased’s name in the amount you would have spent on gifts.
- Celebrate a holiday on another day.
- Focus on helping others.

Remember that if you try something new and it does not work, you do not have to keep doing it.
Activities for Holidays & Celebrations

Shopping
If you feel you must shop, pick a time when the stores are not crowded, such as early in the morning when the stores first open. If going to stores to shop seems too difficult, try shopping on the Internet or through catalogs or home shopping programs on television.

Sending Cards
Your mailing list can be shortened or even omitted this year. Decorations and holiday dinner preparations can be limited or even postponed.

Accepting Invitations
Lower demands and expectations on yourself. You may not want to accept every invitation you receive or participate in all of your usual activities. However, if you find yourself declining all invitations and postponing all activities, push yourself to attend or participate in some events. You may enjoy them or actually feel comforted by them.

Traditions: Old and New
Some of the most difficult aspects to deal with are “traditions.” A death in the family may mean that a much loved tradition may lose some of its joy. It may even be an end to that tradition. However, do not discount the possibility that new traditions can be started.

If you always host a meal on the holiday and serve the same food, try changing the menu. Or you can ask someone else to act as host this year. Attend religious services at a different time or at a different house of worship. Open gifts at a different time or location. Some grievers have even found that going away on a short trip during holidays and special times was a welcomed change.

Being Prepared

Expect some physical and emotional responses to your loss. Although everyone’s grief is different, there are some responses that are commonly experienced by people who are grieving.

These physical and emotional responses are normal grief reactions and can be experienced by both adults and children.

PHYSICAL
- lack of energy, difficulty sleeping
- headache, stomach distress
- difficulty breathing, muscle weakness
- chest pain, dry mouth, skin rash
- nervousness, over-activity
- change in eating habits
- change in bowel pattern

EMOTIONAL
- fear, guilt, anger
- shock, disbelief
- sadness, loneliness
- anxiety, crying, nightmares
- lack of concentration
- preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased
It's Okay to Feel Sad

Special times are filled with unrealistic expectations of happiness and joy. Even people who have not experienced a major loss can feel pressures, depression and fatigue.

Accept that there will be times when you are sad and depressed. Give yourself permission to feel what you feel. You have every right to feel sad, depressed and anxious, or whatever emotions arise. Just be sure to be intentional about dealing with them.

It's Okay to Feel Good

Remember too, to give yourself permission to feel good, to laugh and even to have fun. Some bereaved individuals feel guilty if they find themselves enjoying an activity.

Feeling good and laughing are your body’s way of letting you relax and regain some strength for a few moments during your grief. It is a normal and healthy response. You are in no way being disrespectful to the memory of the deceased if you enjoy yourself at times.

Crying

Allow yourself to cry when you feel a need to cry. Ignore any advice you hear to be strong and not to cry. Crying helps you both physically and emotionally. It has an effect similar to exercise in that it reduces stress and calms anxiety.

Lower Expectations

Go easy on yourself. Remember you are going through a physically and emotionally stressful time. If you want the holidays and special days to be the same as they always were, you are in for disappointment and frustration. No matter what you do, you will not feel as joyous as you did in the past. This doesn’t mean you still cannot enjoy the day, even smile and laugh. It will take time for you to adjust – maybe years.

Confide in Someone

Find someone who will listen to you without feeling he or she must come up with answers to your problems. What you need is someone who will listen to the words and stories that are bottled up inside you even if it’s over and over again. This person may be a family member, friend or clergy person. Professional grief counselors are another excellent resource when seeking someone to talk to and confide in.