

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Elyzabeth Marcussen, 443-837-1559  
[emarcussen@hospicechesapeake.org](mailto:emarcussen@hospicechesapeake.org)

### **When someone's missing from your holiday picture:**

#### **6 tips for surviving the season**

(PASADENA, MD, Sept. 25, 2017) – Holiday traditions often come with name tags. Bob's mulled cider. Jason's family Menorah. Sue's Christmas newsletter. These are special people, and the role they fill makes these seasonal traditions an integral part of family gatherings and memory-making.

When that person has passed away, these once joyful traditions can become painful reminders of their death, especially in the first year. You have only just begun the grieving process when suddenly you're faced with something that triggers deep sorrow – a slow cooker of cider, the first lighting of a Menorah, Christmas cards in your mailbox. Now that Bob, Jason or Sue are no longer there to share in them, each of these simple things is so different.

Grief does not close up shop for the holidays. But there are ways to cope this time of year. Bereavement counselors from Chesapeake Life Center offer these tips for surviving the season.

1. **Skip out on some traditions this year:** Give yourself space and permission to do less during this time. It is the best gift you can give yourself. For example, don't send out the annual card. Your friends will understand. "It is OK to skip a tradition," Sarah Montgomery, Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical said. "It does not mean you are abandoning it, you are just putting it on hold. You can resume it any year."
2. **Do the tradition in a new way:** There may be traditions you want to continue, but it's too painful or awkward. For example, maybe it is difficult to decide whether to hang your loved one's stocking or leave it in storage. Instead, do it differently. "You can hang his or her stocking and invite family and friends to write notes or memories to place in the stocking," Montgomery said. "Then, as a family, you can read the memories out loud and preserve them from year to year."

3. **Make an escape plan.** Amy Stapleton, Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor, suggested that if you do decide to attend a holiday activity, make an escape plan. That way, if you experience a wave of grief, you can step away for a few minutes, or even leave. Rather than riding with someone, you may wish to drive yourself or use a ride service so that you can leave early if you need to.
  
4. **Re-evaluate your traditions.** “Grief has a unique way of giving us the permission to really evaluate nearly everything, including the holidays,” Stapleton said. Consider what parts of the holidays you enjoy and what parts you don’t. Let go of what doesn’t serve you any longer.
  
5. **Take time to reflect:** In this busy time of year, everyone expects us to be...busy. It can sometimes feel like a competition to see who has baked the most cookies, mailed the most cards or attended the most parties. It can be tempting to join in as a way to avoid your feelings of missing your loved one. Instead, Susan Coale, Licensed Certified Social Worker-Clinical and Director of the Chesapeake Life Center suggested that you set aside time to quietly reflect on your feelings, on memories of holidays with your loved one or even on things you would like to be sharing with them now. Write your loved one a letter, look at pictures or take a moment to shed a few tears. All of these are healthy ways to experience and reflect on your feelings.
  
6. **Above all, communicate:** Communicate what you can handle comfortably during this time to your friends and family. “Let folks know that you might need to take a break from festivities after a while,” Roberta Rook, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, said. Let them know it’s not because you don’t want to be with them, but because you need the time to recharge and gather yourself. Tell them whether or not it’s alright for them to talk about your loved one. Make them aware if you need to make changes in your role in family holiday responsibilities. “By relating your needs, you minimize the chances for misunderstandings and hurt feelings,” Rook said.

There is no right or wrong way to handle grief, just like we each celebrate the holidays differently. Decide what is right for you and do it. You also have every right to change your mind, even a few times.

### **Hope Full Holidays**

Join Chesapeake Life Center grief professionals at this workshop aimed at helping those grieving a loss get through the holiday season. Pick from one of two Saturday sessions:

- 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Nov. 18, at 9500 Arena Drive, Suite 250, Largo, Maryland.
- 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Dec. 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena, Maryland.

The cost is \$10. Registration is required and can be completed by calling 1-888-501-7077.

###

**Chesapeake Life Center**, a program service of Hospice of the Chesapeake, serves hospice family members and the community with bereavement services and activities aimed at enhancing the quality of life for those grieving the loss of a loved one. For more information, visit [www.chesapeakelifecenter.org](http://www.chesapeakelifecenter.org).