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**Chesapeake Life Center's HopeFull Holidays gives permission to grieve**

**(Pasadena, MD, Sept. 23, 2016)** — With all the shopping, baking, writing cards, hosting parties, school and community functions, etc., the holiday season can be a stressful time for anyone. Many will say it is all worth it, though, to spend a joyous time with family and friends.

But imagine being caught in that whirlwind when you have lost someone close to you. The woman whose husband would hide a gift on a pine bough can't bear the thought of decorating a tree this year. The man whose mother made the best latkes struggles to set up a menorah for his children.

"There are expectations of tradition at this time of year, even when we are grieving" Chesapeake Life Center Grief Counselor Becky Sheckelhoff said. "We don't realize how much energy grieving takes."

That is why Chesapeake Life Center offers its annual HopeFull Holidays seminar. Led by hospice grief counselors, adults ages 18 and older are given the opportunity to participate in small and large group activities that help them find a way to honor the memory of their loved ones while still granting themselves permission to grieve.

One of the activities actually is called "I give myself permission to \_\_\_\_\_." Sheckelhoff said during this activity, many participants begin to open up as they hear others around them confess they don't want to participate in holiday traditions, and are comforted to hear it is okay to make concessions such as "I give myself permission to use paper plates instead of the fine china," or "I give myself permission to not join in the celebration this year."

"A gift from your loved one" is another activity that takes place in the seminar. Participants are asked to take a moment to reflect on one gift their loved one gave them in their lives. Then, they are given a scroll upon which they write down their gift. They roll up the scroll, wrap a ribbon around and take it with them when they leave.

"You are remembering that your loved one is still a part of you and that their legacy is a gift that is always with you," Sheckelhoff said.

Sheckelhoff said many people come expecting to find practical ways to get through the holidays. They leave with something greater than that. “They come away feeling lighter and not so alone, knowing that there are others that feel just like they do,” she said.

“HopeFull Holidays is a safe place to quietly honor their loved ones away from the noise and traffic of the holidays,” Sheckelhoff said.

HopeFull Holidays seminars will be held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 19, at the Chesapeake Life Center’s Prince George’s County location at 9500 Arena Drive, Suite 250 in Largo; and from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 3, at the Chesapeake Life Center’s Anne Arundel County location on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus at 90 Ritchie Highway in Pasadena.

The fee is \$10 per person, with pre-registration requested. For more information or to register, call 1-888-501-7077 or visit [www.chesapeakelifecenter.org](http://www.chesapeakelifecenter.org).

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*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.*