(Headline) Coping With Grief During the Holiday Season

(lead-in) There are many ways for those grieving to get through the holidays, which include planning ahead, getting support from family members and friends, and simply just taking it easy.

By Karen Perry

Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, Ramadan, Kwanza and New Year’s Day are holidays that can be a difficult time for people who have experienced the death of a loved one, especially a death related to drugs.

Reminders of the loss are everywhere, from holiday dinners to work socials to celebrations on TV and social media. It can be painful to watch others who are feeling thankful and are celebrating when you feel lonely or sad.

Particularly in the first year, many bereaved have to develop new holiday rituals and traditions to cope during these times.

There are ways to get through the holidays without feeling overwhelmed by planning ahead, getting support from family members and friends, and simply just taking it easy.

NOPE Task Force asked Maritsa Yzaguirre of Peace of Mind Counseling and Wellness in Wellington, Fla. for her insights on handling grief during times of celebration.

**Q. What do you recommend people do during the holiday season to overcome feeling down or depressed?**

A. Find a support group in the area or friends you can spend time with. If you aren't able to do that, try volunteering at a local shelter or church.

**Q. What are some ways to bring the joy of the holiday season to people who have lost a family member or a close friend?**

A. Receiving cards and letters from friends helps a lot. Also, being part of a local church or religious organization helps as well.

Here are other thoughts on coping during the holidays, according to articles in the Huffington Post and Vista Healthcare.

**Allow others to help you.** If the death happened recently, you could still be in shock. This is a time for receiving from those who love you.

**Everyone grieves differently.** Don't feel that you must grieve the same way others do.

**Understand that there are many components of grief.** Anger, denial, despondency – all of these feelings are normal. The most important thing is not to become stuck in any one feeling.

**Take care of yourself.**Avoid using alcohol to self-medicate your mood. Try to avoid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Physical exercise is often a solution for depression. Buy yourself something that you always wanted but never allowed yourself to indulge in.

You might be hurting, but you will survive the holidays. And before long, you will heal, and memories of your loved one or friend will go on without pain.

For now, just remember, you’re not alone.

*Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.*