

Media Release

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Coping with the holidays after a loss: Live to love

(GAINESVILLE) - What are your expectations for this holiday season? Are you hoping for joyful, stress-free family gatherings? Will you find opportunities to relax with friends? Is there ever enough time to complete all your holiday decorating and baking? Will you feel the need to pretend everything is normal?

If you've recently lost someone you love, you may be wondering if "normal" is possible. Your hopes are focused on getting through your first holiday season without your loved one. You're hoping that you can make it through each day without falling apart, as well as cope with the flood of holiday memories you shared.

As difficult as the approaching holidays appear to be, there are ways to make them meaningful and positive. Though your heart is in pain, be mindful that your heart is where your loved one now resides. The process of healing has begun.

"There is an opportunity this time of year to have a different grief experience," says Haven Hospice's Grief Counselor Vonceil Levine, MSW. "Even if you have only a thimble full of energy, you may want to fight for something different than pain. This is a ray of borrowed hope."

Make the most of this ray of hope by honoring your lost loved ones. Make them a part of your holiday celebration by lighting a candle in their memory. Let family and friends surround you with a circle of love. Take time to look at photos, share memories, and laugh and cry together. Give yourself permission to smile and laugh if you feel the urge.

"As we move into this season, you take a vacation from grief," Levine says. "The destination is to an emotional place other than pain. Upon your arrival, you can schedule time to remember, to love, to make memories that say to your loved one who has died, 'We miss you, we love you, we remember you, and we live to love you.'"

"Surround yourself with all that brings you comfort, peace and joy," she adds. "Make your loved one proud that you are living. Your reward is living. Live today, love today, and let your legacy of love live on."

For additional support and the opportunity to share with other grievers, Haven offers a support group called "Coping with the holidays after a loss." Haven offers a multitude of grief support services,

including individual and family counseling and camps for children and youth who have experienced a loss. Haven also hosts SASHA's Friends, a support group for children who are anticipating a loss. Sessions are available throughout our 18-county north Florida service area. For more information, call Vonceil Levine at 352-692-5105 or 800-727-1889.

About Haven Hospice

Haven Hospice is North Florida's expert in end-of-life and palliative care and is one of three 2008 Circle of Life Award® winners nationwide to be recognized as leaders in improving the care of patients near the end of life or with life-threatening conditions. Haven Hospice has also been recognized as a Florida Pacesetter for its leadership in promoting living wills. Haven Hospice has served more than 50,000 patients and families since 1979 and has been licensed in Florida as a not-for-profit hospice since 1980. For more information, visit www.havenhospice.org, or call 800.727.1889.

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