

H.O.P.E.

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Helping Overcome and Provide Encouragement

**Dear
Friends,**

**Find the
redemption in
the change**

That wisdom is offered by journalist Rob Brezsny. He was a 19 year-old college student when he became the shooting victim of a crime while on the campus. Recently, he revisited the scene of the crime.

At the exact spot, he spent time thinking about that moment and asked himself: "Had there been any benefits that came out of that difficult event?"

The answer, he says, was "a resounding yes! I identified several wonderful developments that happened specifically because of how my destiny was altered by the shooting. For instance, I met three lifelong friends I would not have otherwise encountered."

Today his advice to others who experience painful change: "Find the redemption!"

To find the redemption begin by asking yourself:

- *What good can I make to come from this?*
- *What meaning can I evoke from this painful change?*
- *How can I best manage this so that it eventually brings me advantage rather than only the disadvantage I now feel?*
- *Who are the individuals who can help me survive and even thrive as a result of this?*

Then, much later, re-visit this time in your life by reflecting on how the actions you took to manage the change proved to be beneficial. Find the redemption!



ADVICE FROM A GRIEVING MOTHER

A young woman lost the baby she was carrying - Gabrielle - at 23 weeks of pregnancy. She lived for two hours before peacefully passing away. Friends called, phoned, and emailed condolences. All were well meaning but some individuals "hurt more than they helped," she says and offers these suggestions to

those who truly wish to be helpful.

Don't say ... "You're young, you can have another." We don't want another. We want the baby we lost.

Don't say ... "Well, they needed another angel in heaven." We want her here on earth and feel that we need her more than God possibly could.

Don't say ... "You're lucky you didn't get to know her before she died." Yes we did. She was in my body for 6 months. She lived, moved, and communicated in her own little way. My husband held her closely for the two hours she lived. He got to know her too in a special way.

Don't say ... "It's nature's way of weeding out the weak or the sick." No child is a waste no matter how 'weak' or 'sick' it is. I could have looked forward to a life of love from a child, sick or not. Ask many of the families that care for and love chronically ill children.

Do say ... "I don't know what to say" or "I'm sorry." Sometimes it is more comforting to know that your friends or family are truly at a loss for words. It is better to say "I don't know what to say" than to say something that might hurt.

Do say ... the child's name if the parents have given one rather than simply say "the baby." When a child dies at a year or 10 years, people refer to that child by name. It should be no different for a baby who lives only a few hours, days or was stillborn.



BLUE CHRISTMAS

I couldn't bear to hear my co-workers' happy voices calling out "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year." I had to leave the room for fear of bursting into tears. My daughter died in an accident six months earlier and this was my first holiday without her.

While the society goes on a journey of peace and joy in December, those who have lost a loved one to death experience a "Blue Christmas." That phrase comes from a song written by Billy Hayes and Jay Johnson and popularized by Elvis Presley. It references feelings of sadness and loneliness during the holiday.

The time from Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Christmas, Kwanza and New Year's Day are painful and awkward for grievers. Here are some tips for managing the holidays while grieving.

Plan ahead. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holiday. The key is to plan ahead. Have a family meeting to discuss the best way to do the holiday. Some people opt to completely alter the way they celebrate while others find it comforting to maintain the same traditions.

Set limits for yourself. Know the difference between what you *want* to do and what you *can* do. Let go of any perfectionist impulses you harbor about putting on the perfect holiday. If you've been accustomed to doing the major share of shopping, cooking, decorating consider asking other families members to take on some of those responsibilities.

Plan how you will shop. "I was dreading the very idea of being in a large mall, crowded with festive shoppers, hearing holiday music in the stores," recalls

Tips for managing the holidays while grieving

Andrew whose wife died seven months earlier. "Then, a friend suggested I do my shopping online. I had an enjoyable time shopping through the various "stores" and placed all of my holiday gift orders online. It did the trick and kept me out of the malls." If you find it impossible to be in shopping centers, then make holiday purchases from catalogues, from the internet or simply give cash gifts.

Intentionally remember your loved one. As a family, everyone can gather around a candle, light it and observe a few moments of remembrance. Or, consider hanging a stocking for your loved one inviting people to put notes in containing their thoughts, feelings and memories.

Talk with a good friend about your feelings. If you're sad, talk about the sadness. If you're lonely, talk about the loneliness. Let a good friend listen and be supportive. It will cut down some of the pain. Remember Shakespeare's wisdom: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break."

Take care of your physical self. This means getting regular exercise, eating balanced meals, avoiding alcohol and drugs, and getting adequate rest.

Take care of your spiritual self. Meditate, prayer, read inspirational literature and books, participate in the holiday services of your faith community.

Honor your loved one through a holiday memorial gift. Give the amount you would have spent on gifts for your deceased loved one to a charity in his or her name. Another suggestion is to purchase a gift for your loved one but donate it to his or her favorite charity.

Balance activity with solitude. During the hectic pace of the holiday season you will need time to be alone. Balance activity with solitude. The solitude will allow your body and mind to rest and renew.