



Trauma Support Matters

Vol. 1, No 5

November/December 2009

Trauma Support Services of North Texas, Inc. (TSSNT) is a 501(c)(3) working in collaboration with experienced professional therapists in the community to provide services for trauma survivors and their families.

Trauma Support Services of North Texas

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You *Can* Make It Through Happy Holidays

Many who have experienced a tragedy such as sudden death or a serious physical or emotional injury struggle with a cloud of sadness during the holidays.



The onslaught of holiday cheer may seem too much to bear, giving rise to new or returning bouts of depression, panic attacks, nightmares, and flashbacks. Some have more trouble sleeping, while others don't want to get out of bed. Tears can come easily, often when least expected. Old ailments, including headaches, gastro-intestinal problems, and aches and pain may return.

Families who have made this pilgrimage offer the following suggestions to those starting down the path. Many were surprised to discover that the anticipation of a holiday was more difficult than the actual holiday. Holidays can be manageable if you take charge of the season rather than letting it take charge of you.

December Events

Candlelight Vigil of Hope and Remembrance

(Mothers Against Drunk Driving)

Tuesday, December 1

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

The Radisson Hotel - Dallas Love Field

Champagne room

1241 W. Mockingbird Lane

Dallas, Texas 75247

Please RSVP by November 29

800-382-6233

Tree of Angels Ceremony

Thursday, December 3

7:00 p.m.

Cliff Temple Baptist Church

125 Sunset

Dallas, TX 75208

(Bring an angel ornament to honor a crime victim)

TSSNT Therapist Case Consultations

Wednesday, December 9

9am - Noon

Trauma Grief Groups, a Seeking Safety Group, and a Support Group

For Domestic Violence Survivors

...will begin after the first of the year.

To receive information

or register for a group, contact:

Jeannette at 972-709-4904 or

tssnt@att.net

Change Traditions

Trying to make this holiday seem like the one before it will only intensify the difference. Gather the family and decide which traditions you want to keep and which ones you want to let go. Change holiday plans to accommodate the needs and wishes of those who are hurting the most. Pay particular attention to the physical needs of someone now disabled.

Create a Special Tribute

Some families light a special candle and place it on a holiday table to honor the memory of a loved one who has died. Others keep a chair empty and place a flower or other memorial on the seat. Some write treasured remembrances and place them on a special plate or bowl for those who wish to read them. Families of an injured person may want to explicitly express gratitude for their survival and presence at the event.



Plan Where to Spend the Holidays

Many people think going away will make the holidays easier. This may be helpful if you will be with people who love and nurture you. However, if travel is arranged as a means of trying to avoid the holiday atmosphere, remember that American holidays are celebrated throughout this country and in many parts of the world. It is impossible to escape holiday reminders.

Balance Solitude with Sociability



Rest and solitude can help renew strength. On the other hand, supportive friends and family are a wonderful source of support if they accept you as you are and do not tell you how they think you should feel. If you are invited to holiday outings, make an effort to go. Attend musical or other cultural events that lift your spirits. You may surprise yourself by enjoying special outings, even if you feel like crying later.

Relive Fond Memories

To go through the holidays pretending that nothing has happened is a heavy and unrealistic burden. Think about holiday seasons you enjoyed in the past and identify a few memories you want to hold in your heart forever. No one can take those away from you. Celebrate them and be grateful. If feelings of sadness pop up at inappropriate times, such as at work or in a public gathering, try thinking about what you have rather than what you no longer have. Focus on the blessing of the memories in your heart.

Set Aside Some “Letting Go” Time

Schedule time to be alone and release sad and lonely pent-up feelings. You may want to cry or write about your thoughts and feelings. If someone has died, you may choose to write a letter to say “Goodbye,” “I love you,” or “I’m sorry.” Even though it may feel strange, allow your loved one to write back to you through your pen. You may be surprised at what you write. By setting aside special times to allow painful feelings to surface, it becomes easier to postpone expressing them in public.

Counter the Conspiracy of Silence

Family members may consciously or unconsciously conspire to avoid mentioning the tragedy in your family. This is usually a well-intentioned but misguided attempt to protect your feelings. If this seems to be happening, take the initiative and talk to your family about the importance of talking openly about what has happened.

Try to Notice the Positive

Some people conclude that facing the holidays is simply “awful.” By deciding prematurely that “everything is awful,” you are generalizing irrationally from your personal tragedy. Although you may have difficult times during the holidays, you also may experience joy. Accept the love and care of others. Reach out to someone else who is suffering. Give yourself permission to feel sad and to experience joy.

Find a Creative Outlet

If you have difficulty talking about your feelings, consider other creative ways to express yourself. Write a poem or story that you can share with others. Buy watercolors or oils and put your feelings on paper or canvas, even if it’s only splashes of color. Contribute to a favorite charity or organization.



Remember the Children

Listen to them. Celebrate them. Children may have deep feelings that can be overlooked if you spend all your time focusing on yourself. Putting up holiday decorations can be a draining emotional experience, but recognize its significance to children. A friend or relative may be happy to help you decorate or purchase and wrap gifts. Also consider shopping on-line as an alternative to the frenzy of mall shopping, but don’t try to “buy” your way out of sad feelings.



Protect Your Health

Physical and emotional stress changes the chemical balance in your system and can make you ill. Eat healthy food and avoid over-indulging in sweets. Drink plenty of water, even if you don’t feel thirsty. Take a good multi-vitamin. Get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Talk with your doctor about an antidepressant or anti-anxiety medication if you think it will help. If you are unsure about how the medication will affect you, share your concerns with your doctor.

Utilize Available Resources

People of faith are encouraged to observe services and rituals offered by their church, synagogue, mosque, or other faith community. Many “veterans of faith” can offer you serenity, a quiet presence, and healing wisdom. The most valuable helper usually is someone who shares a common experience or understands something about what you’re going through. Spend as much time as possible with the people you love the most.

Most important, remember that you can’t change the past, but you can take charge of the present, and shape the future. Total recovery may not be possible, but what you make of your trauma is largely up to you.

Janice Harris Lord, a licensed social worker and professional counselor, is a founder of Trauma Support Services of North Texas. This article is summarized from the chapter on Holidays in her book, No Time for Goodbyes: Coping with Sorrow, Anger, and Injustice After a Tragic Death.

What TSSNT Offers

Our therapists are well-established in trauma theory based on an integrative approach to treatment that addresses affect regulation and symptom-management, as well as the cognitive and emotional processing of traumatic events and memories.

Services include:

- Individual Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Group Therapy
- Education Groups

Eligible Participants:

Those who have experienced a sudden, traumatic event that interferes with their ability to function such as:

- Vehicular crashes
- Homicides
- Suicides
- Accidents such as drownings or falls
- Sexual and domestic assaults
- Burglaries and robberies

