

From all of us at the Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation, we wish you a peaceful holiday season and a comforting new year.



Coping with grief at the holidays



The holiday season, with its emphasis on family traditions and merriment, can be harrowing for people grieving their loved ones.

Seeing happy kids, being told it's the most wonderful time of the year, can make grief feel deeper. And the stress of extra obligations – from parties to wrapping gifts – can further burden you, when you're already feeling overextended and exhausted.

"So many aspects of the holiday can be tricky," said Eleanor Haley, the co-founder of What's Your Grief, based in Baltimore. "If anyone is feeling overwhelmed and anxious and sad, they are definitely not alone. It's common for grieving people to feel a little worse than usual."

Grief is not a static thing, said Haley, who has master's degrees in counseling and psychology. Grief changes every year.

For the first year after your son or daughter is stillborn, you might feel lonely and isolated because you had imagined a full house with a living baby. (There's also the fact that Christmas is all about a baby.)

Every year after, you know your child would have been 3 or 5 or 7, and you see presents at the store you might have liked to buy.

"That scar and that ache remains, 'if only they were here and what it would be like,'" Haley said. "We grieve things in the present and future as we kind of evolve and grow in our lives."

To help you through the holidays, Laura Johnston, media chair for the Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation, interviewed Haley about a few ways for baby loss moms and dads to cope.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Getting involved

Been wanting to get more involved in the Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation? Please fill out this form to indicate your volunteer interests! Then we will be in touch.

www.tinyurl.com/ohstarlegacyvolunteer

Excessive movement

Pregnant women are often told to call their doctors if they feel a decrease in movement, or kicks, of their unborn babies. But a new international study says "excessive activity" can also be a sign of trouble. [Read more.](#)

Sleeping on your side



New research shows that sleeping on your side is safer for your unborn baby, to allow more oxygen.

Tommy's, a nonprofit focuses on pregnancy health in the United Kingdom, has launched a #sleeponside campaign. Of course, sleeping on your side won't completely prevent stillbirth, but sleeping on your back could create a higher risk.

[For more information on side sleeping, see here.](#)

What are we up to?

How can you include your baby in your holiday activities?

It depends on the celebrations and what they're celebrating and some of their rituals. We always encourage ways to make loved ones a part of the holidays even if they're not physically present. Continuing a bond is very, very healing, and it helps to keep a memory alive. It also allows a safe dialogue among other family members.

We do recommend that families really be thoughtful about what works for them. Is it every year you buy a special ornament for your loved one? Maybe other children want to help you pick it out and it goes on a tree. Some people like to have their own special tree. You might hang a stocking for that person. Some people might have pad of paper and ask people to put their thoughts about that person in the stocking.

Some people may light a memorial candle.

Many people say it's a grief trigger, when you're out shopping and you see a present you would have liked to buy that person. Some people buy it and donate to someone in need, or give to someone who might appreciate.

We really encourage people to be very thoughtful. What your family's values are, how might you be able to put good into the world in the name of people who have died.

What do you recommend when you feel left out, like other people have it all and you're miserable?

I think that can be really tough, especially at an age where other people are having babies. And all the family photo cards. It can be really, really easy to do that comparison and fall into a pit of despair because that's not what you feel like. You don't feel jolly.

But we don't know what other people are experiencing. Try not to compare. And if this year you feel especially susceptible, we recommend taking a little break, taking a little time out if you're feeling like it's really getting to you.

Any advice for those holiday parties or family get-togethers when well-meaning people say something hurtful?

I'm always shocked by the types of comments people say they receive. A lot of times these things really stay with you and can make you feel bitter and angry, isolated and alienated. People are going to say dumb things. You can choose to handle that in a lot of different ways. We choose to believe the majority of people mean well.

Unfortunately there's no really good suggestion. It's really unfortunate that it's up to the grieving person to be the bigger person and explain why that comment is hurtful. But chances are that person will learn from that interaction and hopefully handle themselves better next time.

You can try to take a deep breath and walk away.

It is just the reality that people don't always know how to handle those situations and aren't always equipped to saying the best thing.

Above all else, we recommend you enter the situation prepared. If you get overwhelmed and exhausted, it's OK to leave early. Many people like to attend events with a supportive somebody as a buffer.

Where can grieving parents find support?

We definitely recommend looking in your area. Hospices often have groups for different types of losses. If you have a child who's grieving, look for a grief center. Definitely look into the resources, even if it's not a support group. You might find a remembrance ceremony you can attend. Be aware and keep your eyes out for opportunities to participate in things like that.

We recommend opening up to some kind of support from families and friends. I think that one thing that can be intimidating for people social anxiety is getting asked all those questions. As a response they might decide to isolate. We encourage people to find a balance. Isolation can be detrimental.

Need more tips on getting through the holidays? [What's Your Grief has 64 ideas.](#)

The Ohio Chapter met for an open meeting in November and discussed a few initiatives:

Organizing meet-ups: Would you like to get together with other baby loss moms and dads near you? We're working to plan gatherings and partner with other stillbirth groups.

Pushing for a state tax credit: We plan to campaign in 2018 for a one-time tax credit for stillborn babies.

Sewing white gowns: Some thoughtful ladies have donated wedding dresses, for us to turn into gowns for stillborn babies. Now we're looking for volunteers to sew.

Planning a perinatal bereavement conference: Plans are in the works for a conference at the Cleveland Clinic next spring. Stay tuned!

If you'd like to help with any of these, please fill out the form above. Thanks!