Love and Grief

by George Mclaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

The Winter of 2022 slowly welcomes another month, as it is now February. We have navigated our way through the traditional holiday season into the New Year and with the promotion of Valentine’s Day in full swing, we quickly face another reminder of the death of our loved one.

While some may not sense any added feelings of grief, others might prefer to skip February 14 altogether. It is a day, much like Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, when there is an unspoken expectation to celebrate a person who for some of us is no longer with us. It can be difficult to see all the hearts, flowers and cards which speak of that precious relationship that has suddenly changed. Regardless of whether it was a spouse, a parent, close friend or one of many other types of loving relationships we celebrate on Valentine’s Day, managing the memories and powerful emotions often becomes a moment-by-moment challenge.

So, what are our options? We can’t skip over the day or just spend the day in bed trying to forget it. Ignoring the day or choosing to be miserable all day are not healthy solutions to the situation. Instead, consider re-thinking the day. Realize that grief will probably be unavoidable so have a plan in advance to manage it, perhaps as you have managed other special days such as holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays. Here are a few ideas to consider:

• Take time alone to write a letter of love to the one who has died.
• If you have a journal, then take some time to write out your thoughts and feelings.
• Reminisce a little throughout the day. Look at pictures, think of memories, laugh a little and cry a little.
• Visit a place that was special to you and your loved one.
• Participate in an activity or hobby previously shared and enjoyed with your loved one.
• Make a list of ways your loved one enriched your life and continues to influence you.
• Surround yourself with people who love and support you. Don’t be afraid to acknowledge that being together as a family highlights who is missing and take every chance you get to remember and talk about your loved one.
• Draw comfort from doing for others. Take a meal in to someone who is all alone and needs some encouragement. Write some cards to shut-ins or call someone to let them know that you were thinking of them.
• Make a donation or gift in memory of your loved one to an organization that assists those in need especially during these hard winter months.

There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Valentine’s Day after the death of a loved one. The best way to cope is to plan ahead, receive support from others, take care of yourself, and experience whatever emotions arise, whether joy, sadness, or anger. Doing so will allow you to fully grieve and continue on the path toward wholeness and healing.