The holiday season can be particularly difficult for those who are grieving. In an effort to affirm their grief and support them I wish to share what I have learned from the bereaved over the years. May we be considerate as we respect this time of Painful Joy for many.

P—personal. The grief process is unique. You should never compare your grief with someone else’s. You must trust it to unfold as it will and as a supporter you should never compare to your own experience with someone else’s grief.

A—all about learning. Learning how to live again, gaining a new perspective on life is critical for reclaiming joy in your life. Learn what you can as you grieve and be patient with yourself. Be patient with the griever and welcome the lessons they share with you. Apply them to your own life.

I—inevitable. A wide variety of responses will occur as you grieve. Expect them to come. Take them as they come. Plan your day allowing for extra time to work with your grief response. Allow individuals the time they need to grieve.

N—never forgetting. This season can be an important time for remembering. Consider ways you will remember your loved one during the holidays. You don’t have to do things the same, but don’t delete your loved one from your plans (have more than one). Encourage folks to remember the traditions, favorite foods, special stories, etc.

F—fickle. Grief is unpredictable and can come out of nowhere. So while you are out shopping you may have a grief burst when you hear a song or see a familiar face, even if you have had a couple of “good” weeks or months. Let it come and let it go. Don’t turn away from someone who has a sudden grief burst. Stay with them. Cry with them. Encourage them to share if they want to. Follow their lead.

U—uncomfortable. From uncomfortable to unimaginably painful, grief ebbs and flows. Open yourself to the pain and allow it to enter your being. It is here in the pain that the work is done. Avoid distracting people from their pain. Go with them as far as you can. Sit quietly in the painful moments.

L—letting others in. Tell your story. Find people you can be with that are not going to tell you how you should feel, people who will listen. If you are the listener, listen with your eyes and tell them what you hear. Our actions definitely speak louder than our words, so make sure what they tell you matches what you see.

J—journeying a difficult road. This journey of remembering encourages hope to return to your life. Find ways to honor your loved one through ritual, donation, service, etc. As you honor your loved one your journey will become purposeful again. We can offer deep compassion to the bereaved during their journey.

O—ongoing. Grief does not end. The response to loss changes, but it never goes away, nor do we want it to because that would mean forgetting our loved ones and this is often a deep fear held by those who grieve. Do not impose a timeframe for the grief process.

Y—yours. Your grief is yours. It is normal. It is natural. It is filled with emotion. Claim it. Honor your emotions. As we offer support we must not judge. We must accept the process so long as it is not harmful to the individual or to others (if you identify any threatening emotions or actions please seek professional guidance).

For all the grieving, May you be comforted,
Peace,
Tammy Koenecke