

During grief we experience a wave of emotions. Often, we want to avoid situations, reminders or people associated with the person you have lost. The trouble is there is a large ripple effect. You start avoiding something small and then you start to avoid more and more things that remind you of the painful grief feelings. If you are going to relearn a new way of living with the loss, we have to engage in new experiences. One of these ways is to anticipate and put a plan into place.

Grief happens in waves and one way to help with these waves especially a large one is to anticipate when a large wave is coming and strategize about how best to ride the wave. Some of these are predictable such as certain times of year they will likely trigger them. These may include holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, the day of the loss, first day of school, etc. The attached handout helps with these predictable ‘difficult times.’ There are other waves that catch us by surprise and for those there are different ways of helping.

Anticipating and planning for difficult times

There can be difficult times when grief can be triggered more easily. There will be difficult times regardless of whether you acknowledge this ahead of time or not. It is okay to be sad, don’t criticize yourself for being emotional. Your emotions are attached to the person you have lost and it is important to own them and honour them.

People find that it is better to predict when the intensity of grief will increase, and plan how to manage this in advance. Doing this can increase your sense of control and show you that you are not completely powerless in the face of this loss. You can minimize the degree to which grief is disruptive and frightening, even if you can’t control its occurrence or intensity. Take some time and fill out the attached form to help you identify the most difficult times of the year. Try to rate the intensity you may feel and make some notes about what makes it difficult and what you dread most, or the things you are most worried about.

If you have trouble planning, think about what is getting in the way. During difficult times we are confronted with reminders that they are gone. In the moment it is difficult to think about what to do, how to navigate and leave you feeling hopeless or powerless. These handouts are meant to encourage you to anticipate and plan. To provide guidance about what to include in the plans and suggestions about things that can be done.

Next steps

- Identifying Difficult Times Work Sheet
- Difficult Times Planning Work Sheet