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Bearing loss harder at holidays

BY LORRAINE ASH
DAILY RECORD

Holidays cause emotional confusion for those in grief.

"People feel guilty about feeling good," said Amie Harris, a certified grief therapist. "Some wonder if they should put up a tree."

Others want to celebrate but feel odd about continuing traditions as they were when their beloved was alive.

Sorting through emotions, and getting practical suggestions on how to manage the holidays, are what the New Vernon psychotherapist presents in a free Dec. 7 lecture/discussion seminar called "Coping With Loss ... A Holiday Bereavement Program" at the United Methodist

Church in Morristown. Harris is aided by her colleague Maria Caruso, also a certified grief therapist.

The goal is to normalize feelings, Harris said, and to give people permission to do what they feel is right for them.

"If you want to put a setting at the table for the person who dies, do it," she said. "If you want to wear your husband's pajamas, wear them. It's OK."

Effort and pain

Those struggling with the effort and pain of Christmas shopping may want to avoid a mall, she said. Instead, try shopping on the Net or through catalogs. The idea is to keep up the traditions, but in a different way.

"Nobody wants to see the baubles and the smiles at the mall when you're grieving," Harris said. "The first year is the hardest. That's when people feel lost."

The gathering takes place in a living room with a fireplace. Candles are lit. Mulled cider and refreshments are served so as to create a comfortable atmosphere. Participants also are sent home with a surprise gift and a gift packet containing articles and poetry.

Those who attend "Coping With Loss" will get to ask questions. There is room for 25 people and pre-registration is required. Call (973) 993-1466.

The seminar is offered by Living With Dignity, a non-profit corporation led by Harris that presents a series of

free bereavement support programs for adults and children throughout the year, including The Teddy Bear Club, a bereavement group for children ages 5 to 9. Kaleidoscope, a group for children 10 to 15, will begin in the new year.

Long illness

Adult groups include Sonata, which addresses the needs of those who lost someone to a long illness or cancer. Avalanche is designed for those traumatized by a sudden loss.

For more information about these programs, e-mail cancer-counseling@att.net.

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WARREN WESTURA / DAILY RECORD

Grief therapists Amie Harris, left, and Maria Caruso will help bereaved people find emotional comfort at a one-night seminar at the United Methodist Church in Morristown.