

Is There A Happy Birthday After They Have Died?

When a person dies who had a pivotal space in our lives, it can feel natural and right or it can feel unfair and too soon. It has the potential to leave a gap; a gap that is often filled with sadness, loss, grief, anger, numbness, yearning or a multitude of other feelings.

If our relationship was a difficult or even non-existent one; if they weren't there for us, or were abusive; if we are estranged, then our grief can be complicated by the loss of the (perhaps secret or unacknowledged) 'dream' of a "magical reconciliation" and the unanswerable questions that still linger in the gap. Why didn't we have a loving relationship?

No matter the reason, the 'gap' can still exist.

In the lead up to special days such as birthdays, Mother's/Father's Day, anniversaries, and other days special to you and your family or friends, our feelings can often be amplified.

How do we navigate such an 'in your face' events? Perhaps ask yourself some questions:

- What were your traditions prior the death of this person?
- What do you want to do?
- What do others want you to do?

We encourage people to plan these types of events, and there are two main plans:

- One to engage in the event.
- One to escape from the event.
- Beforehand, it's a good idea to bring those involved together for a coffee and openly talk about the day/event.
- Allow each person to share the importance of this event for them (or lack thereof).
- Make a plan together for the day.
- Be open about needing to escape if it feels overwhelming or too much.

Our wonderful MCMPC families and clients have shared with us how they cope with and manage these events. Here are some of their ideas:

- Keep to the traditions as you have always done. Take a few moments to share as a group what they loved and valued about someone.
- Do something completely different. Create a new tradition e.g. if weather permits, have a picnic or a family walk.
- Donate to an organization or a charity, either by participating in an event that happens close to the day or give financially in the name of the person who has died.
- Plant a tree or buy a bench, in their name.
- Do something that the loved one loved doing e.g. going to the movies, creating, or completing a family craft project.

Whatever you choose to do and however you choose to do it remember to be kind to yourself (and remember, too, that the MCMPC Bereavement Team can help you find the right support at this time.)

"There is sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."
— Washington Irving