



WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Healing After Loss



Letter from Bereavement Coordinator

The month of February brings with it some of the shortest and coldest days of the year, accompanied by the added bonus of snowy and icy weather (if you live in our great state of Michigan). These factors typically mean increased time indoors, and less connection with others. When we are less active, that is typically when our thoughts and emotions can take over, both positive and negative. For those of us who like winter activities, winter might be a great time for us! Winter can also provide a sense of relief that we do not always have to be somewhere, allowing us to place less expectations on ourselves, finding more solace. The colder temps and lack of sunlight can make these days seem even shorter and darker for those of us struggling mentally. For those of us with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) the impact of these winter days can have even a more significant impact, to the point where we feel some days it's hard to just get out of bed.

In this issue, we will be focusing on this important topic. Whether you dread winter, or are looking forward to it, the journey we find ourselves on will always have its good days, and its hard days. Remember, in just a couple months, we will be through the winter days, and get to see the trees start to bud again and the flowers begin to bloom!

Just like the weather, there are easier days ahead.

Sincerely,
Lisa Gardner
Bereavement and
Volunteer Coordinator



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Seasonal Affective Disorder & Grief: How to Manage Symptoms During Difficult Times: by Rebecca Fleckenstein, Volunteer Content Writer

As the days grow shorter and sunlight lessens, many people find their mood shifting along with the seasons. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a real and impactful type of depression triggered by changes in daylight. Affecting more women than men and becoming more common with age, SAD can be challenging, especially when coupled with other stressors, such as grief or loss. In this article, we'll explore what SAD is, how to recognize its symptoms, and practical strategies to help manage this condition and build greater resilience.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that people experience when shorter days and less daylight create a chemical change that causes depression. SAD usually starts in adulthood and increases with age. Women are more likely to develop SAD more than men.

There are two types of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). *Fall-onset (winter depression) is the most common SAD.* The symptoms start in the fall or early winter and ease up in the summer months. There is also *spring-onset (summer depression)*, which is not as common. These symptoms start in late spring or early summer and can last one to three weeks.

What are the Symptoms of SAD?

The symptoms of SAD are similar to the symptoms of grief, such as:

- Reduced pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased sensitivity to rejection
- Feeling grouchy
- Feeling anxious



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Ways to Cope With SAD While Mourning

- Talk to your doctor
- Do things that you enjoy and make an effort to schedule time devoted to that activity, and stick with it
- Take baby steps – don't set ambitious goals for yourself right now
- Go for a walk and breathe in the fresh air
- Go outside or sit by a window to get some sunlight- Vitamin D can do wonders for our mood!
- Eat fresh food made with whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, as diet can have a direct impact on our mood
- Delay making important decisions until the period of depression has passed
- Stay away from drugs and alcohol as much as possible
- Stay connected with others to prevent social isolation
- Engage in mindfulness exercises (ex.- journaling) or other activities that allow you to safely be present with yourself. See more information as we reflect on this idea on page 5.

Because SAD can make grief feel even heavier during certain times of year, employing these strategies may offer gentle support by helping you process your emotions and find moments of comfort amongst your loss.



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Mindfulness or Journaling Exercises to Cope with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD): by Rebecca Fleckenstein, Volunteer Content Writer

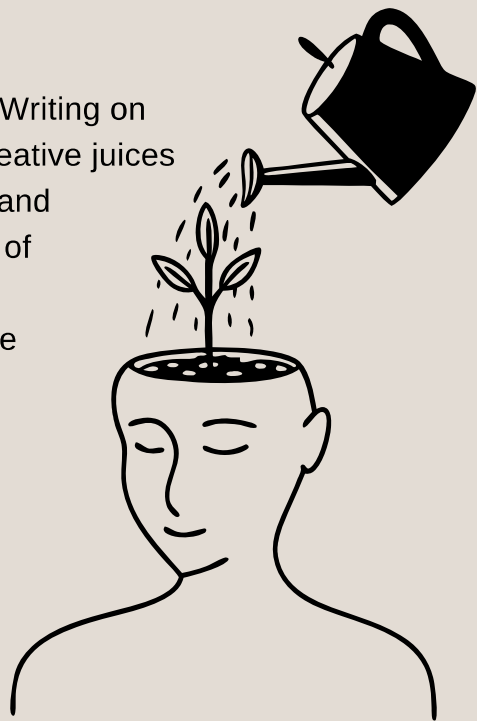
Mindfulness is an activity where you intentionally focus your attention on what's happening in the present moment. This includes your own thoughts, emotions, and what's going on around you. Journaling is the practice of writing down what you think, how you feel, events that have happened to you, and your personal insights.

Some mindfulness exercises you can do during the cold months are to start off by paying attention to your surroundings. "Stop to smell the roses", so to speak. Experience the things around you with all of your senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste). For example, before eating your favorite food, stop and look at it, smell it, and truly taste it. Another mindfulness exercise is to treat yourself the same way you would treat a friend. Thirdly, focus on your breathing when you have negative thoughts. Sitting down and focusing on your breathing can take you away from your negative thoughts.

Journaling is something you can also do during the cold months. Writing on paper with a pen or pencil, or typing out your thoughts, gets the creative juices flowing. Make it a habit to write at the same time of day. Doodling and drawing are usually not a part of journaling, but they can be a part of your journaling. When you first start journaling, keep it simple. Some suggestions to start might be writing a poem or a song. Write about a stressful event you encountered and how you handled it and got through it that day, or the things you are grateful for.

Dealing with Seasonal Affective Disorder can be tough, especially if you're already going through a hard time. But it's important to remember that you're not alone, and there are things you can do to help yourself feel better. Simple habits like trying out mindfulness or journaling can make a real difference.

Even small changes can help, and with time and self-care, you can start to feel better.



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Honoring a Loved One During the Winter Months: by Rebecca Fleckenstein, Volunteer Content Writer

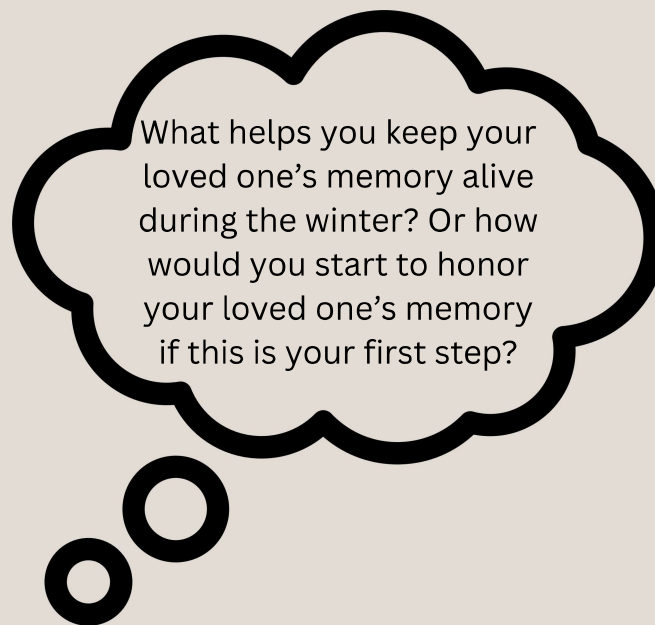
Grieving is hard, but grieving during the winter months can be especially difficult for some. Some people find it difficult to get motivated because winter is dark and dreary. Others say that winter helps them to grieve because they are isolated in their house, just like everyone else. No matter if you find that grieving during the winter is difficult, or a little easier than the rest of the year, honoring your loved one keeps their memory alive and acknowledges the difficulty of grieving during a joyous time.

Here are some ways we can pay tribute to our loved ones and honor them in a meaningful way:

- Prepare their favorite dish and share it with family and friends.
- Set a place at the table for them to honor their presence in your life.
- Light a candle surrounded by pictures of your loved one and items that remind you of them (battery operated candles are also a good alternative).
- Create a memory book that reflects their life and personality, filled with some of your most cherished memories.

By honoring your loved one, you can find comfort, healing, and connection during your time of grieving.

SELF REFLECTION:



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