

# HEARTLINKS GRIEF CENTER

## FATHERS' DAY AND GRIEF



As it is with many holidays throughout the year, Fathers' Day often sparks a multitude of emotions, especially when you're in the midst of grief. While we hear primarily from children who are grieving the death of a father or father-figure and fathers who have lost a child, the day can be equally treacherous for those with complex relationships to fathers and fatherhood. Just a simple trip to the store can be a challenge during the lead-up to Fathers' Day. Those in grief face the barrage of card aisles and advertisements for "Great gifts for Dads!" along with well-meaning questions from friends and others about their plans. Then there is the day itself, which can be overwhelming to consider. It can also prompt new, creative ways to acknowledge the day, including doing nothing at all!

If you're concerned about the approach of Fathers' Day or want to support someone who is, here are some suggestions to consider:

1. Remember that the lead-up can often be the hardest part. Be sure to build in time and activities that are comforting and supportive for at least a week before the holiday.
2. Come up with a plan - even if that plan is to do nothing. If you choose to acknowledge the day, consider doing something that connects you with who the person was and what they meant to you.
3. With children, it's helpful to talk with them ahead of time about what they would like to do or not do. You may need to do some negotiating as siblings can have different ideas about what to do. If one child wants to do something and another doesn't, reach out to friends or family to see if they can help with the "being in two places at once" dilemma.
4. Children may also have to navigate Fathers' Day activities in school, so check in with teachers ahead of time to find out what is planned and include your children in a discussion about what would work best for them.
5. Let children know that it's okay to want to celebrate and equally okay to not want to. Don't force a child to pick another adult to honor, unless it's something they want to do.
6. Be prepared for other people! There will be friends and family who reach out and those who don't. Consider letting people know ahead of time what kinds of messages and texts feel supportive (and which ones don't). It's commonplace for cashiers, wait staff, and even random strangers to say, "Happy Fathers' Day!" or ask, "How's your Father's Day going?" so it can be helpful to come up with a few answers ahead of time. Some people choose to be honest and say something like, "Not so great. My dad died this year," and others prefer a curt, "Fine. Yours?" There's no right or wrong way to respond.
7. Social media is likely to be a flood of posts all about Fathers' Day, including memories of past years. Consider taking a social media break or choose ahead of time what you want to post.
8. Plan something for yourself - hike, brunch with friends, a trip out of town. Think through what environment you want to be in, knowing that you are likely to run into dads and families.

9. Focus on a category - say food, movies, activities, color, or music - choose a few from one or all the categories that your dad or child loved. If you don't know, and many people don't, go with your best guess or pick the ones you love.
10. Volunteer - doing for others can often take us out of our own experience and create a sense of contribution, belonging, and connection.

In the end, how you approach Fathers' Day is as unique as grief and your relationship with the person who died. Let yourself be creative in figuring out what works and allow yourself to change your mind at the last minute.

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For more information, please call Heartlinks at 618-277-1800.

