

# Embrace the New

As the holidays approach, many of us are coping with loss and unwanted change. There may be a sense of being slightly disoriented, as we face these weeks without the familiar traditions, celebrations and usual social gatherings. We all know that it is hard and exhausting to deal with logistical matters in the best of times. This year is more difficult, as we factor safety concerns into our plans.

When I was volunteering for Hospice, co-facilitating groups for the bereaving spouse or partner, I gained valuable wisdom around supporting grieving individuals during the holiday season. It is important to cultivate self - compassion by listening to one's own heart. Many people get caught in the belief that they have to do the same things as other years when they may not have the energy and/ or desire to do so. In my years of witnessing grief, in my practice as a psychologist, I was in awe of how one person might gain comfort in maintaining the routines while, for others, it was a too painful reminder of what was lost. It takes courage to acknowledge our own capacities as well as limitations.

My husband and I will not be with our children and grandchildren this Thanksgiving. The decision was not easy and, of course, left us both disappointed and sad. I approached my husband the other morning with the following; "I have this idea for Thanksgiving day. We could have the same old... same old (probably stated with a slight grimace) or we could (voice lilting upwards) make a feast of our favorite foods." He either read my, not so subtle intonations accurately, or just joined me in the excitement of the NEW, but he quickly said, with a smile, "the feast of our favorite foods." I then noticed how his mind quickly went to thinking about this idea and offering up various thoughts. The important thing here is that his sadness and disappointment about not traveling to our children morphed, even if only for a few minutes, to a more positive place. I have since shared my idea with various people and had them begin to generate their own ideas of doing something novel this Thanksgiving. Bringing novelty into our lives can help our mood and reshape our focus. This is not about taking away emotions, it is about adding things to help "soften the blow".

Adding new experiences to our lives has been shown to have a positive impact on our mood. We can all get into a routine of the "same old, same old." The familiar pull of the known is strong and often impedes our willingness to try something new. We may hold an association from the past and not really recognize its influence. Even a small amount of apprehension can shut down the attempt at something new.

My dad was an avid golfer but seemed to be a bit too obsessed with the game and his score. People know that I love sports and being outdoors. Oftentimes, I was encouraged to try golf but would veto the idea without much thought. A friend gave me a lesson for my birthday last month and, within minutes, I discovered that I love golf. The excitement of learning something new has generalized into other areas of my life. New energy can come in small changes such as where we have our coffee in the morning, changing furniture in the house, walking in the evening before bed, etc. Life is busy and full of demands but purposefully adding something constructive that brings in new energy can be a good mood regulator. Now.... if I can only convince my husband about a puppy!

The staff at Healthy Perspectives wishes you and your family a healthy holiday season where new experiences can help offset the changes and loss.

*Carolyn Morgan, Ph.D.*