

June 2007
Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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THE HARD ANNIVERSARIES

June is a month of happy anticipation, participation, and remembering. It's weddings and graduations and family reunions. It's vacations and birthdays, new babies and travel, picnics and new endeavors. Calendars are crammed to overflowing.

In the midst of this, some are marking hard anniversaries –the death of a beloved, the death of a relationship, or the death of a dream.

Dreams die hard. That is as true for children as for adults. Never discount the dashed dreams of the children and youth in our midst. When a child's best friend chooses another best friend, when a youth doesn't make the traveling basketball team, when a graduating senior gets a thin envelope from their first choice college – this is loss. Help them learn to express their sorrow, disappointment, shame, and anger. Don't try to cheer them up too quickly. As adults, you, too, can grieve the new job or promotion not received, the friend that moves across country, the hope that is dashed. Look it full in the face and grieve.

When a relationship dies, we don't have a way to mark that. What do you do with sorrow, anger, fear, and a sense of abandonment? If it is the other parent of your child, you may need to process your loss with other caring and discreet adults. Do not vilify the other parent or invite your child to choose sides. Listen to your child's pain. Reassure your child. Surround your child with other caring adults. Build a network of support for your family. If the broken relationship is with another family member, tell only the essential information, assuring your child that you love the one who is now estranged, pray for him or her, and wait for the day you will be reunited.

On the anniversary of a death, please don't leave out the children. Last June, my beloved friend of more than 30 years died of complications of diabetes. Molly was cherished by her husband and children and their spouses and grandchildren. Her parents and mother-in-law and siblings all have a hole in their lives. Her friends will mark this anniversary, too. No one has forgotten. This is a time to remember and celebrate all that Molly meant to all of us, to talk about the loss ... and her legacy. Four generations of family will mark this remarkable life.

I do know that Jesus, who claimed Molly in the waters of her baptism, has now reclaimed her forever. We are an Easter people, a people of eternal hope. Here are some suggestions for those who will be marking hard anniversaries.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

The Four Keys can help to mark these hard anniversaries in meaningful, healing, caring ways.

CARING CONVERSATIONS: Take time to remember the person, the relationship, the dream. Talk together. Tell stories. Look at pictures. Name the sorrow and cry. Name the joy and laugh. Remember.

DEVOTIONS: Together, thank God for the person, relationship, or dream. Thank God for being present as you walked through the valley of the shadow. Thank God for healing. Pray, read scripture, sing songs of faith. Remember.

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS: Buy a special candle. Light it each evening. Remember Jesus, the light of the world. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1:5 Sit in the light. Remember.

SERVICE: Pain is an equipping ministry. Reach out to someone suffering a fresh loss. Deliver dinner, stop for coffee, send a card, have children draw a picture, or just to listen. Children are hardwired to be empathetic. Let them care, too, and remember.