

TIPS FOR ACKNOWLEDGING MOTHER'S DAY & FATHER'S DAY



The Dougy Center
The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

Like many holidays throughout the year, Mother's Day and Father's Day can spark a multitude of emotions, especially when you're grieving. While these holidays primarily make us think about children who are grieving the death of a parent or caregiver and parents who have lost a child, these days can be equally treacherous for those who have complex relationships with parents and parenthood.

A simple trip to the store, along with well-meaning questions from friends and family about your plans, can be challenging during the lead up to these holidays. Then there is the day itself, which might be overwhelming to consider. For some, navigating this time of year prompts new and creative ways to acknowledge the days, which includes doing nothing at all!

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

1. Remember 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 the person 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 wants and needs. If one child wants to do something and another doesn't, ask friends or family to help with the "being in two places at once" dilemma.

4. Children may also have to navigate Mother's Day or Father's Day activities at school. 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 Mother’s Day!” or ask “How’s your Father’s Day going?” so it can be helpful to prepare 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 simple, “Fine. Yours?” There’s no right or wrong way to respond.

7. Social media will likely be a flurry of posts all about the 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. It can be a hike, brunch with friends, a trip out of town, or anything that feels right to you. Think through what environment you want to be in, knowing that you are likely to run into families celebrating the day.

9. Focus on a category (food, movies, activities, color, music, etc.) and choose a few from one or all the categories that your person 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 something for others can often take us out of our own experience and create a sense of contribution, belonging, and connection. You might pick an organization or cause that was important to your person.

In the end, how you approach Mother’s or Father’s 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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Our Mission

The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. Our *Pathways* program provides support for families facing an advanced serious illness.

The Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

The Dougy Center has been helping children, teens, young adults and their parents cover with death since 1982. Our practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what we have learned from more than 45,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or tdcbookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.