

Coping With (Known) Trigger Days

Posted January 6, 2014

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It became apparent to me not long after my Mom died that I had two known days when I would especially struggle in my grief journey: Mother's Day and the anniversary of my Mom's death. I call them trigger days. They were guaranteed days I would end up immensely sad, grieving, crying and generally, missing such a significant person in my life.

In the beginning, I ran away from society on these days. Literally, I would take off work, leave town and go somewhere where I knew no one and where I had no memories associated with my Mom. A couple of years after my Mom passed away, I tried to stay and face one of those days. It was Mother's Day and because I'm religious, I decided to attend church. The second they began to honor the moms, I got up and walked out as tears streamed down my face. It hurt too much to feel left out, to know I was not able to celebrate my Mom with her.

I am not sure at what point I went from dreading these days to learning how to deal with them, but I have learned pointers to make my trigger days more successful.

Here is a list of different ways that have helped me cope.

- **Buy a card:** (This could be applicable for birthdays, special days, etc.). A friend of mine did this for me first. He bought me a Mother's Day card and encouraged me to write out how I felt about my Mom not being there or simply how I felt about missing her. It took me weeks to actually get up the courage to write in the card, but I felt so much peace and comfort when I actually did it.

- **Wander the card aisle:** I may never buy another card for my Mom, but when those trigger days are approaching, I like to wander the card aisle and read the fun ones she would have liked or the “Hallmark” ones that would have made her cry.
- **Do something special:** On the anniversary of my Mom’s death, I like to go out to dinner.
- **Help someone who reminds you of your loved one:** If I hear of a struggling mom, I jump at the opportunity to help. I can’t always help, but I always try. If your significant person was a sibling, grandparent, aunt/uncle or friend, who can you help and in doing so feel that you are remembering and honoring your loved one?
- **Remember the good memories:** When trigger days come, it is so easy to remember and replay the day we lost our loved one. For a change, I like to remember the good memories. The memories that make me smile...even if I am smiling through my tears.

These coping mechanisms help me feel encouraged and less like these days will consume me. The truth is that I know, despite my loss, I am stronger than these trigger days. Doing something productive is a good reminder of my inner strength. What helps you with trigger days?

Taken from: Actively Moving Forward®, a young adult and college grief support network (healgrief.org)