Dreading Father’s Day? Advice from counsellors on how to cope

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Sunday 21 June is Father's Day in the UK. While for many people Father's Day is cause for celebration, for many of us it brings more mixed and complex feelings. For those who are grieving the loss of a parent or child, or who have a difficult relationship with their father, the day can be particularly painful.

We spoke to counsellor and BACP Governor, Mhairi Thurston, to compile the following advice for anyone who needs a little support on the run up to Father's Day.

Forward plan your self-care

"If you think the day is going be difficult for you, plan ahead and arrange to do something that will help you get through it. There are a variety of different self-care strategies you can use. Some involve distraction and others involve reflection. It depends on you. For example, some people find physical exercise helpful, whether it's going to the gym, doing yoga or going out for a country walk. Others find a duvet day comforting, curled up watching a favourite film or reading a good novel. Some people find solitude helpful in giving them time to reflect on their thoughts privately, while others enjoy spending time with friends or family. Do whatever is right for you and whatever you think will help you best.

Minimise your stress levels

"Part of your self-care may involve avoiding situations that are stressful. Be kind to yourself. Realise that you may be feeling a bit more fragile than usual. Try to free up the day from deadlines or a long list of chores.

Everyone is different

"Painful situations affect people in different ways. Pay attention to how you're feeling and try not to be too critical of yourself for feeling this way. Some people find it helpful to express bottled up feelings of grief, anger, guilt or even relief. You can do this by looking at photographs of loved ones, listening to significant pieces of music, writing a letter to your loved one explain how you are feeling, which you then read aloud to yourself and keep or destroy. It is important to allow yourself to feel and do whatever you need to.

Remember this day will pass

"Although this day may be hard for you, remember it will pass. Perhaps you might consider marking the day in your own way. You can take ownership of it by performing your own ritual in place of the socially ascribed ones.

It's good to talk

"Finding someone you trust to confide in can be a productive way of tackling difficult issues. Tell a good listener how you are feeling and you may be surprised at the positive effect that this can have on your outlook. Don't be afraid to reach out for help, whether from friends, your GP, a local counselling service or a telephone help line. Online groups can also offer easy-to-access support with people in similar situations, be it a professionally run group, or a community support forum.

Seek professional help

"If Father's Day brings up feelings that you find hard to cope with, counselling offers you a safe, confidential place to talk about your life and anything that may be confusing, painful or uncomfortable. It allows you to talk with someone who is trained to listen attentively and to help you improve things."

If you decide to access counselling privately, BACP's public website www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk has a 'find a therapist' directory which will help you find a private counsellor in your local area. It also contains a wealth of information for anyone considering counselling including information sheets, videos and links to recent research.

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