

Behavioral Resources And Institute for Neuropsychological Services

# the BRAINS Express

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**The First Holiday Season Since. . .**



### **The first holiday season since...**

Jennifer Figurski, MS  
Pre-Doctoral Intern

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**Remember to Join us on Facebook for other updates and information:**

- **BRAINS Foundation**
- **B.R.A.I.N.S.**

### Clinic Opening in December

#### **Lakeshore Office**

BRAINS is now offering services in Grand Haven through Affiliation with Generation Care:  
[www.generationcare.org](http://www.generationcare.org)

[Dianne Bruursma, LMSW, ACSW](#)

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**Edited by:** Rochelle Manor, PhD & Michael Wolff, PsyD

The holiday season is nearly upon us, which brings about a rollercoaster of emotions. The fourth quarter of the year is typically a time for celebration, traditions, spending time with people we love, and perhaps most importantly, a time for reflection. Holidays are emotionally charged consisting of great joy and unfortunately great sorrow as we look back on how things are different from years past. More so, holidays resemble bookmarks in our lives. They represent the beginnings and endings of various chapters in our lives. So with the holidays approaching and we begin to reflect upon the year, we become very aware of the people that are no longer with us, as well as other significant changes in our lives. That said, it is understandable that the holiday season is wrought with an increase in the rate of depression.



We must understand that grief encompasses all forms of loss; not just for someone's life, but also for a lifestyle, or a job, or a relationship, or a home. Loss comes in many different forms and the value of a loss varies by person. Given the economic downturn of the last

several years, many individuals and families alike are grieving for many different reasons. The holiday season may not be welcomed as it had been in the past due to a void left by someone who is no longer there or perhaps a different living situation or even different financial means.



The first holiday season since a significant loss is a difficult time to face; however, we have the power to grieve in a healthy manner in order to retain the joy that should come with this time. You may be aware of the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). You may also be aware that you can experience some of the stages several times before your grief is resolved. There is a chance that this holiday season will send you back to anger or depression. This regression is natural and expected during this time of year. How you cope with the resurgence of these feelings is what does not have to be unhealthy.

So how does one grieve in a healthy way during the holiday season? There are many ways to still enjoy this holiday season while managing grief. Firstly, you must allow yourself to feel however it is you feel and accept it for what it is. In recognizing your feelings perhaps the most im-



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portant thing you can do is create a game plan for dealing with these emotions. Know who you can talk to and rely on during this time. Make sure these are people who know you well and will be able to offer you comfort.



Once the holidays are in full swing, it is important to maintain good nutrition and sleep hygiene. When we do not sleep properly or eat healthily, our mood can be directly impacted. Consider your traditions and what feels most comfortable for you and your family during this first holiday season since your loss. Celebrating old traditions tends to be comforting for young children as it maintains familiarity and structure. However, beginning new traditions may be a way to reduce the obvious sense of loss. If you are grieving the loss of a loved one there are many ways to turn your grief into remembrance and instead of mourning a loss, you celebrate a life. In order to remember that loved one, the family can make a donation on the loved one's behalf, plant a tree or light a candle in their honor, or simply take part in an activity that was enjoyed by that loved one. Many individuals find comfort in keeping busy during this time. There is no better way to spend your time than helping other individuals in need. Volunteering your time and talents can go a long way during the holidays, and serve to benefit others as well as yourself.

This first holiday season since your loss is going to be filled with many emotions. It is often the case that people who are grieving also tend to feel a great deal of guilt during this time. It is perfectly natural to be happy and sad at the same time. You should not feel guilty for enjoying your holiday season despite the loss that you have endured. Talk about these feelings and seek out additional support if the feelings become overwhelming.

Understand that you have the power to make this holiday season what you want it to be. It is still a time for celebration, traditions, friends and family, and reflection. The painful loss brings about an opportunity to redefine your holiday traditions. It will not be the same but that does not mean it has to be worse. It is my hope that healthy grieving brings you peace and the ability to enjoy this time.



## Sensory Tips for Holiday Survival

Heather J. Herrick, MS, OTR/L

The holidays, while they are exciting and enjoyable, can also be stressful. The changing schedule, the holiday parties and associated noise, extra and perhaps somewhat unfamiliar people, and excess sugar can set up a scenario that has parents pulling their hair out. Children, whether they have trouble processing sensory input or not, can benefit from a few simple sensory considerations to help them (and parents) make it through the holidays without

going bald. Here are a few tips, suggestions, and games that can make the holiday season a little less stressful.



- Try to keep some routines intact. Bed time, awakening time and associated routines, for example, can help a child feel "on an even keel." Even when traveling, try to keep these routines as stable as possible.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for movement. Bundle up and head outside. Roll in the snow, play tag, go for "hikes" with heavy backpacks (no more than 10% of the child's body weight), or have a game of "snow football." If you are trapped inside, have a dance party to some of your child's favorite music. Invent new dance moves together or teach one another your favorites. Mini trampolines give great input and are tons of fun. Do some gentle roughhousing or set up some safe jumping into piles of cushions, pillows, and blankets.



2845 Wilson Ave. SW, Ste. D,  
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- Get the whole family involved. Take some time for parent(s) and child (ren) to enjoy sensory activities together. Kids fighting and picking at each other all day? Try some animal walks together (duck walk, crab walk, bear walk, etc) or play “Hot Dog” (family members take turns laying stomach down on a sleeping bag or large blanket, the rest of the family puts “condiments” on to the hot dog by pressing slowly and firmly with hands over arms, legs, and back- then rolls the person up tight and squeezes out the “extra ketchup”). You can also smear some shaving cream on a table top and draw pictures or letters in it with your fingers. Involve the family in clean up: use some spray bottles to spray down the shaving cream and old towels or clothes to scrub it off. It’s multisensory, kids love it, and your table will shine when you are done!
- If your child has been prescribed a sensory diet, be sure to use it more often during holidays than when the child is in school. Remember that he/she is losing activities like recess, gym, art and music class that help to provide opportunities for sensory experiences.
- When your child seems overwhelmed, think of the “The Drops”
  - a. Drop your voice- speaking more quietly helps your child focus on your voice and provides a calming influence

b. Drop your body- research shows that children produce less of the stress hormone cortisol (which can cause anxiety or aggression when levels are too high) when adults are down on their level.

c. Drop the batteries- battery operated toys simply can’t hold a candle to the power of active bodies and brain cells!

- If your child is prone to “melt downs” or emotional “outbursts” in the midst of a noisy, busy family gathering, make plans in advance for a “Safe Space.” Talk to the host (ess) and choose a quiet space, further removed from the main gathering place, where you can set up. A good safe space has, for example; a bean bag or pillow, a child’s favorite blanket and/or stuffed toy, a couple of favorite books and/or some soft music for the child to listen to. DO NOT include items such as hand-held video games or iPods with applications other than music. When you first arrive at a holiday gathering, take the child with you to set up the space. Place the items in a quiet, cozy corner, and tell the child that he may use the space if he feels angry, sad, or irritated. The only rule is that the child must tell an adult that he is going to use the safe space. When a child knows there is an “escape” from an overwhelming environment, it can sometimes be all that he needs in order to remain calm and enjoy the party. And, of course, parents can “encourage” the use of the safe space if the child is unable to self-identify the need to use it. It should not be a punishment, but a “way to help slow your [the child’s] body down for a minute.”

If you keep your eyes open, the holidays are replete with opportunities for rich sensory experiences- from baking cookies to playing in the snow. Harness the opportunities and have a joyous, and relatively calm, holiday season!

Heather J. Herrick, MS, OTR/L  
E: [hherrick@brainspotential.com](mailto:hherrick@brainspotential.com)

“The Drops” modified from *The Out-of-Sync Child has Fun* by Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A.



## Online Safety – The Internet is Everywhere

Adrian Lopez, BBA

With the holiday season approaching, it is sure that children will be getting their hands on new technology, many of the things we took for granted being safe from the internet no longer are. Today most mobile phones come with internet access, Sony Playstation, Nintendo Wii, all of the video game systems have internet access. This season Sony will start selling the first retail marketed HDTV with Google TV, essentially another way of saying an inter-

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net connected flat screen TV!

My point is, your kids are getting online.

If they're not doing it in front of you, they are at a friend's house, on a friend's phone...but there is hope. In fact, there is much better than that, there is YOU!

The key to keeping your family safe online is talking and education, everyone needs to be on the same page as to what is appropriate online, and children need to be comfortable telling their parents about any online bullying. Below you will find resources on how you can take control of your families' online safety.

- It is important that you know what your child is doing online. One good strategy is to make sure your home computer is in a common area with the screen visible from all directions. If your child is a member of a social networking site then you should also have an account on that site and be friends with them. You will know if they are being bullied or engaging in inappropriate activity. Don't forget, most of these social networking sites are available on mobile phone apps as well.
- What is ok to put online and what is not? Information about your travel plans for the weekend should not go on the internet because it lets people know you will be away from your home, feel free to post how wonderful your trip was after you return. Make sure your address is not



posted on sites, your profile may be posted publicly; this is an identity theft issue. Use common sense when you go online, make sure that you know a website before you enter personal information, look for a lock on the screen. If you're not sure, do a Google search. If it is a shady site, you will get results that reflect that. You may avoid scams by just taking a few seconds to search the name of a website.

- Most searches on the internet today are done on Google, from the Google homepage on your home laptop or desktop you can set Google Safe Search options to help filter the content that your children can search for. You can choose to block specific sites or content type. With Safe Search Lock you can lock these settings with a password, go to Google and try it out.
- Blocking content on multiple computers can also be done. By using the settings on your home wireless or wired router (Box that your internet plugs into, probably in your basement) you can specify certain sites to block. Most routers have this ability built in but you also have the option to use software to block content, this will also give you more setup options.

Use these tips to make your family safer. With so many dangers, sexually explicit material, online predators, identity theft, cyberbullying, there are so many questions. That's why I want to direct you back to our friends at

Google, they have a Family Safety Center website that can direct you to information and partners that can help! Check out the Advice from partners link!

<http://www.google.com/familysafety/>

For More Information:  
Adrian Lopez, BBA  
Intelligent Computer Solutions  
Microsoft / HP Certified Professional  
[adrian.lopezwm@gmail.com](mailto:adrian.lopezwm@gmail.com)  
P: 616-780-2447

## **BRAINS' New Lakeshore Clinic Opening in December**

In affiliation with Generation Care, BRAINS is opening a lakeshore office at 16760 Lincoln Street in Grand Haven. Appointments can be made by contacting the main BRAINS number 616-365-8920.

Watch the BRAINS Express for more announcements about services, workshops, and groups offered on the lakeshore!



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**Happy  
Holidays!**

## Fall Leaf Campaign

During the first year of the BRAINS Foundation, we have provided services to families across West Michigan with over \$100,000 in services-Offering meaningful hope to families affected by developmental, medical, behavioral, or emotional disorders.

## Raking in the Leaves

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pledge Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Method:

- Check Enclosed  
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Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Send Donation Receipt:

Yes  No

Bronze Leaf: \$100 – \$249

Silver Leaf: \$250 - \$499

Gold Leaf: \$500 - \$999

Plaque: \$1000 and above

**A leaf with your name/company will be placed on the tree for above donation amounts.**

Any contribution amount is greatly appreciated!

BRAINS Foundation

3351 Eagle Run Dr. NE Suite B

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