

Coping with the Holidays

- ❖ Plan Ahead – Make a list and prioritize things to help you remember what is important and what can either wait or be deleted. Decide on time you want alone and time with others. Decide what Holiday Activities you want to do or not do and either alone or with someone. Holiday Activities may include shopping, sending letters, baking, accepting invitations, attending religious service, exchanging gifts, having a holiday dinner or gathering, etc.
- ❖ Memorialize your loved one in a way that is meaningful to you. This may include giving money to a charity, hanging a Christmas stocking in memory of the loved one, offer a dinner prayer or reflection in memory of the loved one, have a special time when the family share holiday memories or your deceased loved one, light a candle each day in memory of your loved one, planting a tree, visiting a special location, etc.
- ❖ Be Prepared for some physical and emotional responses to your loss. You may experience feelings of loneliness, sadness, disbelief, anxiety, anger, fear, crying, you may also experience difficulty sleeping and concentrating, headaches, stomach distress, nervousness, changes in eating habits, lack of energy. Remember that everyone's grief is different and it is Okay to feel sad, good, to cry. It will take some time to adjust.
- ❖ Be Realistic- Accept your limitations. Decide to accept or decline dinner or party invitations. Decide if you want to decorate the house or not. Decide what you want to do about traditions – change traditions, forget them for this year, try new ones? Be aware of your needs and communicate them with your family and friends.
- ❖ Take Care of Yourself – Eat a healthy and balanced diet. Exercise helps to reduce stress and can increase your sense of well being. Get adequate rest and relaxation. Confide in someone- find someone who will listen to you. This person may be a family member, friend, clergy or you may want to see a professional grief counselor. Do things that help you such as calling a friend, listening to music, reading, journaling, taking a hot bath, playing a musical instrument, art work, gardening, etc.
- ❖ Simple Pleasures – appreciate the healing effects of simple pleasures such as sunsets, cooking a favorite meal, a walk, reading a book, enjoy the companionship of family, friends or a family pet.

Probably one of the most difficult tasks for the person in grief is learning to handle those special days. We offer the following thoughts to help people cope with holidays and anniversaries.

1. Pace yourself during the weeks preceding the holidays.
 2. Set realistic expectations.
 3. Family togetherness is a vital part of celebration, but no one person should dictate how to spend the holiday.
 4. The holiday will be different because a loved one is missing.
 5. Loneliness can be acutely painful. Arrange to get together with friends if relatives are not near by.
 6. It is important for family members to agree upon an equitable division of labor to prevent excessive fatigue.
 7. Do not obligate yourself to spend money for expensive gifts. The gift of one's self is priceless. Look to your motives and reasons for buying before making a purchase.
 8. Alternating sites of celebration reduces strain on any one family member.
 9. This may be the time to establish new traditions:
 - a. Attend religious services at a different time and place
 - b. Change the time of the holiday dinner and opening of gifts
 - c. Make a decision regarding your financial ability to contribute to charities. Whatever you contribute, do it in memory of your loved one.
 10. As the year ends, work on setting realistic goals for the coming year.
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There may be some sense of guilt as you review the previous year. People often think of the things they could or should have done. We cannot retrieve the past. Be ready to forgive those whom you believe were insensitive and thoughtless to you. If guilt feelings are not reconciled, they can cause physical and emotional harm. Ask forgiveness for yourself. [See our handout on grief and regret].

Holiday Coping Questions

What is your biggest worry about the holidays this year?

What is something special your loved one did during the holidays?
Who (if anyone) will do it now?

What is one tradition your family may decide to do differently this year?

Share one special holiday memory.

What is something you could do to help a family member who is feeling sad?
What could someone do to help you?

Think of one way to remember a loved one during the holidays.

What is your favorite thing to do during the holidays?
Will it change this year? How?

Holiday Planner

This simple questionnaire may give you some direction in planning the Holidays ahead.
 Many of the preparations for Christian holidays may also be applied to
 Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice and Ramadan.
 Adjust the lists to fit your own needs.

HOLIDAY JOB LIST WHAT choices do I have?	Do you know WHY you do it? Tradition/habit, choice/obligation	... Does it matter WHERE you do it?	Does it matter WHEN it is done?	... Does it matter HOW it is done?	Does it matter WHO does it?	Do you WANT to change it?
The family meal						
Religious services						
Traveling						
Gift giving-family friends						
Gift shopping						
Giving to charities						
Cards						
Decorating inside/outside						
Cleaning						
Baking/cooking						
Entertaining (your house)						
Family gatherings						
Business parties						
Visiting others						
Taking children to holiday programs						
Holiday clean-up						
Other family traditions (fill in your <i>own</i> needs)						
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