

HOLIDAY TIPS

Tips for the Holidays

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For some the holidays season is one of joy, anticipation and excitement. Certainly, family gatherings, cooking, baking, creative costumes and shopping for gift bring a smile to many children and adults alike. We all have family traditions old and new that define how we celebrate this time of year. After the death of a loved one, the holiday seasons may not feel or look the same. Traditions and rituals may bring a tear or sadness rather than joy and peace. Below are tips for coping through the holiday season.

Recognize the holidays will be different this year.

Do what makes you comfortable, not what well-meaning family, friends or others think you should do.

Grief does not take a holiday, even with all the colorful and cheerful distractions.

Talk to your family and discuss how you will observe the holidays this year. Traditions can be very comforting. You may wish to continue to observe some family traditions and drop others. Consider a new tradition in memory of your loved one.

Be prepared for a chain reaction of memories and emotions that may be triggered by a favorite song or cherished ornament.

Be kind to yourself. Grief brings on fatigue. Your physical and emotional resources are limited.

Allow friends and family to help when they offer.

Get plenty of rest.

Set realistic goals for yourself, reserve the right to change your mind at the last minute.

HOLIDAY HEALING

Helping Yourself Heal During the Holiday Season

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

You Are Not Alone

Holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of someone loved. Rather than being times of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

Love Does Not End With Death

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief – a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society encourages you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights and smells trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

Talk About Your Grief

During the holiday season, don't be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen – without judging you. They will help make you feel understood.

Be Tolerant of Your Physical or Psychological Limits

Feelings of loss will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. And lower your own expectations about being at your peak during the holiday season.

Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

You may already feel stressed so don't overextend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

RITUALS

Rituals for the holidays

Select a candle and dedicate it to the deceased. On special occasions, (holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, etc.) when the physical presence of the person is especially missed, light the candle. You may want to say a short prayer as you light it. Allow it to burn throughout the day as a reminder of the person who died. When you extinguish it, you may want to say another short prayer.

Plant a tree or living shrub in memory of the deceased. You may want to invite close friends and family members to share the ceremony. Light refreshments and a time of sharing memories of the deceased may follow. This is especially helpful on the anniversary of the death.

As a family project, make a shadow box to create a memorial for the deceased. Allow each family member to select one or two items to be placed in the box and choose an appropriate place to display it. You may wish to have a small plaque engraved with the name and dates of birth and death or the deceased and attach it to the shadow box.

During holidays celebrated by the family, make it a point to discuss the deceased. Tell old stories again, and again, and laugh and cry together. Memories have healing properties when shared with others.

As an individual or as a family, consider donating time to charitable organizations in memory of the deceased. You may want to "adopt" a grandparent, finding an elderly resident of a nursing home or boarding facility who has no family, and making him or her a part of your family experience.

At mealtime, offer a toast to the deceased. This may be a formal celebration at the table or just a private, quiet "salute" while watching a particularly beautiful sunset, or while performing everyday chores. Make it your way to say: "I still love you. I have not forgotten."

Do not hesitate to wear articles of clothing or jewelry, which belonged to the deceased. There is a "connecting" which occurs when we wear something that was special to a person loved. A sweater or bathrobe can give the feeling of having her or her arms wrapped around you; a ring or necklace can convey the feeling of closeness that we need in grief. It is a living memorial; something the person values is still treasure despite the intrusion of death.

Write a very personal letter to the deceased. Say in this letter everything you would say if that person could be here with you; this includes anger as well as love. Do not worry about your grammar, spelling or content. Let your heart write the letter, not your mind. When you are content with it, put it away for awhile, but be certain it is in a safe place where it will remain confidential. At an appropriate time, when YOU feel the time is right, burn the letter and allow the smoke to carry the message to the deceased. A nice touch is to add a bit of incense.