



Facing the Holidays with a Grieving Heart

The holidays are not always a happy, enchanting, joyous time for everyone.

As the holidays approach, many who have lost a loved one may experience a wide array of emotions, including anxiety, stress, fatigue, guilt, sadness/depression, and feeling isolated. These emotions, in turn, can affect our ability to cope with the pain and utilize resources available to us. Following are some tips for facing the holidays in a time of grief.

Begin early to think about your holidays.

This is painful because we cannot help but to think about how things will be different this year without our loved one here. But putting it off doesn't allow time for us to process our thoughts and feelings or to grieve our loss. Talk to the family early about how you will observe the holidays this year.

Be patient with yourself. Leave the words "I should..." or "I ought to..." out of your planning process. There is no right or wrong way to handle your celebrations.

Make your wishes be known upfront. There will be many people who may think they know what's best for you and want to make plans for you. This may be helpful to some and irritating to others. **Pay attention to what you are feeling and listen to your heart.** Be honest and make your feelings known before major plans get made. If you're not sure about something, give it a try. If it's too painful, that's okay. You can always step away. On

the other hand, if you find yourself having fun, this does not mean you don't care about the loved one who has died. It's okay to go on with living.

Recognize that family get-togethers and certain traditions may be difficult. Keep the memory of your loved one alive. Share stories and memories together. Spend time with people you find supportive and comforting.

Remember that everyone grieves in their own way. What is right for you may not be right for someone else, and vice versa. Allow one another the freedom to feel whatever each is feeling, and to do what each needs to cope with grief.

Be prepared for the fact that well-meaning people who don't know your situation will wish you "Happy Holidays!" or "Merry Christmas!" All the standard décor of the season will be around you in stores and restaurants. There is no escaping the trappings of the season, so pace yourself when you're out and about during the holiday season.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Seek out professional services if you feel you need it.

The anticipation of the holiday is often worse than the holiday itself.

Take care of yourself. Remember that grieving is both emotional work and physical work. Get plenty of rest, eat right, exercise, take a hot bath—do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. And allow the tears to come. This is a very normal expression of grief and can help with the healing.

*Brought to you by the
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