

Tips on Coping with the Holidays

Take the pressure off. Be careful of the “shoulds”. It is better to do what feels best for you and your family, not what you or others think you are supposed to do. Give yourself permission to not do things.

Evaluate family traditions. There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some people prefer to follow family traditions, while others decide to change them. It may be helpful to create a new tradition that acknowledges the person who has died (making a special dish, hanging a special ornament, etc.). Remember, what you choose to do this time can always be changed next year.

Cope as a family. Family get-togethers may be a source of comfort but also can be filled with a lot of emotion. Be honest with each other about your feelings and try to acknowledge and accept that everyone grieves in different ways. Sit down together and discuss what you want to do with the holiday. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or other family members.

Care for yourself. Holidays can be tiring. It is important to try and get lots of rest and keep some sort of daily routine. Be aware that your emotions can be affected by your sleeping, eating and alcohol intake. Try not to overextend yourself. It's okay to set your limits! Remember your needs are important so try and find a way to balance time for yourself with taking care of others. You will likely need some quiet time to rest and reflect.

Include the children. While they may not express grief like adults, children are grieving too. Include children in the discussions about the holidays. Ask them what they want or don't want. Encourage them to express their feelings. You could involve them with a new tradition to remember the person who has died like creating a handmade ornament and baking special cookies. This is an active way for them to acknowledge the loss without necessarily talking about it directly. They may through doing the activity even open up about their feelings.

Embrace your memories. Memories of your loved one are precious. Some memories are sweet, some are funny and some may not be so pleasant. Share some of your memories with families and friends. Remembering is often an important part of the healing.

Reach out to others. Identify friends and relatives who understand your loss and can provide support and comfort. Talk to them. Let them know how you are feeling and accept their support. Sometimes friends are unsure of how to help. You could give them specific tasks to do (pick up the dry cleaning, make an apple pie, drive you to an appointment) which could benefit you and them. Remember, if grief or family problems feel too overwhelming, it may be best to seek out increased support available in your community.

Plan for the future. Plan something you can look forward to after the holiday to lessen the post-holiday let down and reward yourself for getting through them.

While nothing can take away the hurt you feel, we hope these tips will help you cope with the holidays. Keep each holiday as a reminder of all the things you shared with the person you loved who has died.