

Strategies for Coping with the Holidays

Acknowledge this year will be different. Know that you do not have to keep your holiday traditions the same. Some people find comfort in continuing their family traditions, while others find it too difficult. Give yourself the freedom to do whatever is best for you and your family.

Do what is right for you – have a plan. Plan in advance so you are not emotionally unprepared. Be deliberate. Give yourself the freedom to recognize the holiday in a way that feels right to you. When applicable, keep in mind the feelings of your family members. Talk over your plans with them and respect their needs as well. Compromise if needed. Use the following questions to decide on activities:

- Do I really enjoy doing this?
- Is this a task that can be done by someone else in the family?
- Would (Christmas, etc.) be (Christmas, etc.) without it?
- Is it a one person job or can it be shared?
- Do you do it out of habit, tradition, free choice or obligation?
- Do you want to do it differently?

Be tolerant of your physical/psychological limits and be kind to yourself. Learn which self-care strategies work best for you and practice them. You can negotiate your way through this experience of grief by giving yourself patience and grace. Forgive yourself when you fall short of your expectations. Pamper yourself when you feel stretched beyond your limits. Affirm yourself each time you take a positive step.

Simplify – eliminate unnecessary stress. Grieving takes energy. Be kind and gentle to yourself. Allow yourself NOT to do painful holiday tasks, if you choose.

Talk about your grief. Talk about your grief with trusted friends, family members or a counselor. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel. Express your thoughts and emotions. It is important to find a way to release what is going on inside you.

Mention the name of the person who has died. There is comfort in using and hearing the name of your loved one. A name is a very personal identifier and is often avoided needlessly.

Be with supportive, comforting people. Spend holiday time with people you enjoy. If possible, avoid people that add stress to your life. Have emotional support available during the most painful part of the day.

Embrace your memories and share them freely. Share memories of your loved one as you feel ready to do so. By doing this, your loved one is brought into the special day.

Have a balance of “alone” time and “people” time. People who are grieving often desire more time alone than usual. You may feel the need to be by yourself with your own thoughts and feelings. However, during the holidays it can be difficult to be alone. It can be helpful to inform loved ones that you may need to excuse yourself at times or leave early if needed. Consider driving yourself to events so you have the freedom to leave whenever you feel ready. Know that you can also greatly benefit from the support and assistance of people who understand and care.

Be creative with the use of ritual. Consider creating a ritual in honor of your loved one. This can be something you do individually, with family or with a large group such as a remembrance ceremony. Ritual is a wonderful way to put grief into meaningful activity.

Give yourself permission to enjoy the moments you can. Know that laughter and joy are not a sign of disrespect to your loved one, but a positive sign that you are learning healthy ways to cope with your grief. Remember that moving forward does not mean leaving your loved one behind. Your love for your loved one will always be with you.

Explore your spirituality. Depending on what feels natural, this might mean times of quiet meditation, prayer, reading spiritual books, talking with a spiritual leader, communing with nature or reflecting on what is meaningful to you.

Renew your resources for living. Harbor hope. If you feel up to it, do something for others. The holiday season is a great time to reflect on all that you are grateful for in your life, even in the midst of loss.