Some Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays

**Set realistic expectations for yourself.**Remind yourself that this year is different. Decide if you can still handle the responsibilities you’ve had in the past. Examine the tasks and events of celebrating and ask yourself if you want to continue them. Take others up on offers to cook, shop, decorate, etc. Consider shopping by phone, Internet or catalogs this year.

**Surround yourself with people who love and support you.** Share your plans with family and friends and let them know of any intended changes in holiday routine. Memories can sometimes be a source of comfort to the bereaved. Share your memories with others of holidays spent with your loved one by telling stories and looking at photo albums.

**Try to avoid “canceling” the holiday despite the temptation.** It is OK to avoid some circumstances that you don’t feel ready to handle, but don't isolate yourself. Allow yourself some time for solitude, remembering and grieving, but balance it with planned activities with others.

**Allow yourself to feel joy, sadness, anger – allow yourself to grieve.** It is important to recognize that every family member has his/her own unique grief experience and may have different needs related to celebrating the holidays. No one way is right or wrong. Experiencing joy and laughter does not mean you have forgotten your loved one.

**Draw comfort from doing for others.** Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of you loved one. Invite a guest who might otherwise be alone for the holidays. Adopt a needy family during the holiday season.

**Take care of yourself.**Avoid using alcohol to self-medicate your mood. Try to avoid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Physical exercise is often an antidote for depression. Writing in a journal can be a good outlet for your grief. Buy yourself something frivolous that you always wanted but never allowed yourself to indulge in.

**Create a new tradition or ritual that accommodates your current situation.**Some people find comfort in the old traditions. Others find them unbearably painful. Discuss with your family the activities you want to include or exclude this year. Some examples of new rituals and traditions include:

* Announce beforehand that someone different will carve the turkey.
* Create a memory box. You could fill it with photos of your loved one or written memory notes from family members and friends. Young children could include their drawings in the memory box.
* Make a decorative quilt using favorite colors, symbols or images that remind you of the person who died.
* Light a candle in honor of your absent loved one.
* Put a bouquet of flowers on your holiday table in memory of your loved one.
* Visit the cemetery and decorate the memorial site with holiday decorations.
* Have a moment of silence during a holiday toast to honor your loved one.
* Place a commemorative ornament on the Christmas tree.
* Dedicate one of the Chanukah candles in memory of your loved one.
* Write a poem about your loved one and read it during a holiday ritual.
* Play your loved one’s favorite music or favorite game.
* Plan a meal with your loved ones’ favorite foods.

The most important thing to remember is there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holiday season after the death of a loved one, and that the best way to cope with that first holiday season is to plan ahead, get support from others and take it easy.

Books on Grief and the Holidays

James Miller, *How Will I Get Through the Holidays? Twelve Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died*

Drs. Clarence Tucker and Cliff Davis, *Holiday Blues—A Self-Help Manual on Grief Through the Holidays*

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