

# Grief & the Holidays

## Finding Hope and Comfort

Holidays can be particularly difficult when you are grieving the death of a loved one. Traditions which used to make holidays happy and festive can now evoke sorrow and sad memories. After the death of a family member, it can be difficult to take care of yourself and the children in your family.

While grief can be a winding road filled with ups and downs, there are ways to help you and your family feel supported during the holidays. By being prepared, seeking support, creating new meaning and traditions, and practicing healthy self-care, the holidays can be more manageable and new memories can be made.



### *Have a Plan & Be Prepared*

- ◇ Make a plan ahead of time for the day or days leading up to the holiday to help you feel more prepared.
- ◇ Decide who you want to share the holiday with and how you would like to celebrate.
- ◇ Identify people who can support you on that day, and what you will do if you have difficulty coping.
- ◇ Talk with the children in your family as a group in an open and honest manner about the upcoming holidays in order to help the children know what to expect as well.
  - ◆ Talk about what specifically might be hard for each person during the holidays in order to have support ready at those times.
  - ◆ Each family member may have a different view on how they want to observe the holiday and remember the family member, or some may choose not to acknowledge or celebrate the holiday as each person grieves differently.
- ◇ Let family members know their feelings are valid and they are still allowed to enjoy the holidays even though they may feel sad and be grieving.

***Remember:*** *Although you can't plan for everything, preparing yourself and your family ahead of time will likely make the time easier and more enjoyable.*



### *Communicate with Friends and Family*

- ◇ Reach out to family, friends, or professionals who can support you during the holidays. Let them know what might be difficult for you and what they can do to help you and the children in your family.
- ◇ Encourage the children in your family to reach out to their friends and school professionals for support, too.
- ◇ Help children identify trusting adults in their life who can support them.
- ◇ Be honest with children about the difficulty you may be having.
- ◇ Acknowledge that it is okay to cry and that you all will get through the holidays together, even though things might be different following the death.



## *Create New Meaning or Rituals*

- ◇ Your family may have had holiday traditions and rituals that involved the person who died. While some families may choose to continue with their usual holiday traditions, it may be difficult for others to continue those traditions without that person present.
- ◇ Allow children to discuss their feelings and think of new traditions can be a very healing exercise for the family.
- ◇ Incorporate the person who died into the holidays.
  - ◆ Tell stories, look at photographs, or make the person's favorite food. There are many other ways to keep their memory alive during the holidays.
- ◇ While changing traditions may be scary, the new traditions do not have to be permanent. You can always change them back in the future if you choose.

***Remember:*** *It is okay to celebrate holidays differently after a death in the family. Old traditions may end and your family can create new traditions and rituals that may help your family cope at the holidays.*



## *Practice Self-Care*

- ◇ Take time for yourself during the holidays, as it can be a busy time to care for others by buying presents, cooking meals, or traveling to visit family.
- ◇ Practice deep breathing, listen to favorite song, write in a journal, or go for a run.
  - ◆ These routines and others can help manage your grief and other emotions.
  - ◆ There are also many books and other resources available in print and online for children and adults that focus on grief and the holidays.
- ◇ Incorporate self-care into your holiday plan and help the children in your family to do the same.

**“To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.” – Thomas Campbell**



## The Center for Grieving Children

The Center for Grieving Children helps children grieving a death heal and grow through their grief, while strengthening families, communities, and professionals' understanding of how best to respond to their needs.

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