

Special Days and Anniversaries

Over the first year following a death, you will have to go through the "firsts"— the first birthday, holiday season, anniversary and other special days without your loved one. All of these days are important times when grief may feel worse. Often, because of the complexity of being in a grief process and because we haven't been taught to watch for triggers, we are unprepared for the onslaught of feelings or "strange" behaviors. Frequently, we are restless, emotional, sad or forgetful but don't know why it's happening. Sometimes we don't even remember that the special day is coming soon.

It's helpful to prepare for each special day, and to know that you may be surprised at your responses, whether it's the first year after their death or the twentieth. One woman described her "grief spasms" as "the same feelings of sadness and devastation I had a week after he died, but now they don't last as long or knock me off my feet like they did at the beginning."

Pay attention to when those particular days or periods might occur over the course of a year and calendar them or ask someone to remind you so you don't get caught off guard. Pay special attention to your own needs around the date and give yourself special care. Acknowledging that a particularly painful date is coming may mean no more than just that — acknowledging it and being kind to yourself. Or, you may want to do something special. Following are some suggestions that other bereaved people have given us.

- Spend the day with family or friends.
- Take the day to be alone.
- Tell stories about the life of your loved one.
- Take the day off work.
- Prepare a special meal and invite someone special over.
- Write something about your loved one and send it to people who loved her/him.
- Light a candle.
- Look at photo albums.
- Say a prayer.
- Create art that expresses your feelings.
- Create a memorial garden.
- Take a trip out of town.
- Make a donation to your loved one's favorite charity or group.
- Visit a favorite place you shared.
- Go somewhere completely new.
- Buy special flowers for yourself or for the gravesite.
- Have a party for the deceased with people who loved her/him.
- Plant a shrub or tree.
- Spend the day helping someone else.
- Spend the day focusing on existing relationships ("mending fences" or telling people what they mean to you).
- Call HospiceCare for help.

