

Tips for Getting Through the Holidays When you are Grieving

- ❖ **Acknowledge that this year will be different.** Eliminate whatever you need to. There is nothing you must do. Grief depletes energy. Because of this lessened energy, the simplest of tasks may loom large and insurmountable. How can you face dinners and parties when smiling and laughter feel like the twist of a knife in the raw wound of your loss? How can you attend religious services with all of their reminders and implied promises?
- ❖ **Decide ahead of time how you want to spend the holidays.** You may choose to be with family or alone, to go out of town or stay home with movies.
- ❖ **Do things that feel right for you,** not because your loved one would have wanted it that way, or because your family thinks you should.
- ❖ **Give yourself permission to change whatever traditions or rituals that you need to change.** Nothing is written in stone! Just because something has been done a certain way for twenty years doesn't mean that it is the only way to do it. Change things if you want to. The option to return to the old traditions will be there next year and the year after.
- ❖ **Break the silence** about your loved one so that others know that it is OK to talk about him or her with you.
- ❖ **Change the time, locations and/or menu of traditional meals.** Or eliminate them altogether this year. Attend religious services at a different time than usual or at another house of worship-or don't go at all this year. Decorate differently, have someone else decorate, decorate exactly the same as always or don't decorate at all. Open gifts at a different time than you did before.
- ❖ **Memorialize your loved one in some way that is both important to you and would have meaning for him or her.** It needn't be a large gesture, but it is helpful if it has a unique and personal value. You can acknowledge that your deceased loved one isn't there by putting a candle in their honor on the table, or making a toast, or by visiting the cemetery.
- ❖ **Break large tasks into small pieces.** Don't be afraid to delegate tasks to others.
- ❖ **Tell your family and friends what you need to feel supported.** It may be to do shopping for you, help you cook dinner, or help you create new traditions. They would probably like to help you but don't know what to do. Tell them as specifically as you can.

- ❖ **Be flexible in your plans**, knowing that your energy, moods and needs may change quickly.
- ❖ **Set aside time to be alone and grieve**, to reminisce or journal.
- ❖ **Recognize the sources of discomfort**, try to anticipate even the smallest part that might elicit pain, and then decide what can or cannot be faced, altered or eliminated.
- ❖ **Take care of your own health; guard your own strength and energy**. It is OK to say, "No" to invitations. It is difficult to predict your feelings and energy levels, so it's also OK to change your mind at the last minute about attending dinners, parties and religious services or to leave a function early. You must be your own guide.
- ❖ **Be aware of the stresses of grief on your body and mind**. Eat well (use sugar, caffeine and alcohol moderately), exercise, and get enough sleep.
- ❖ **If you wish to go away for the holidays, do so**. Remember though that you will take your thoughts and your grief with you.
- ❖ **Do something you have never done before**. Give your own life a degree of meaning and value no matter how bereft you are feeling.
- ❖ **Visit support groups, community memorials or church services** with people that you know will support your experience.

