
Tips for Handling the Holidays

At holiday time, many people are dealing with loss and have a dilemma between the need to grieve and the pressure to get into the spirit of the season. Holidays or not, it is important for the bereaved to find ways to take care of themselves. The following tips may be helpful:

1. Plan where and how you will spend your time during the holidays. Planning in advance can be grounding, but also allow yourself to deviate from the plan as you see fit. Identify a person who can support you in making any last minute changes.
2. Select a candle in your loved one's favorite color and scent. Place it in a special area of your home and light it at a significant time throughout the holidays. This could signify the light of the love that lives on in your heart. 
3. Give yourself permission to scale back on activities if you want. Redefine your holiday expectations. This can be a transition year to begin new traditions and let others go.
4. Give yourself permission to express your feelings. If you feel an urge to cry, let the tears flow. Tears are healing. Scientists have found that certain brain chemicals in our tears are natural pain relievers.
5. Try to get enough rest – the holidays can drain one physically and emotionally at a time when sleep may already be disturbed.
6. Be wary of quick fixes. Those who feel hurt are particularly vulnerable during the holidays. Watch out for alcohol and drug abuse, over-spending, etc.
7. Write an “un-sent letter” to your loved one, expressing what you are honestly feeling toward him or her at this moment. After you compose the letter, you may decide to place it in a book, album or drawer in your home, leave it at a memorial site, throw it away, or even burn it and let the ashes rise symbolically.
8. When you are especially missing your loved one, call family members or dear friends and share your feelings. If they knew him or her, consider asking them to share some memories of your loved one.



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9. If inclined, decorate the memorial site with a holiday theme. This could include flowers, garlands, ribbons, bows, evergreen-branches, packages, and pinecones. Decorating the site yourself can be helpful in remembering and celebrating your loved one's life during the holidays, and may free you to cherish the present holiday with your remaining family.
10. Play music that is comforting and meaningful to you. Take a few moments to close your eyes and feel the music within the center of your being.
11. Honor your loved one by donating money in their name to a charity that was important to them with what you would have spent on them for gifts. Consider donating money to the public library to buy a particular book. Have the book dedicated to your loved one's memory. Buy a present for a child who would not otherwise have a gift during the holiday season.
12. Remember the reality that the anticipation of the holidays without your family member is often harder than the actual holidays themselves.
13. Keep in mind that the experience of many bereaved persons is that they do come to enjoy the holidays again. There will be other holiday seasons to celebrate.
14. Do not be afraid to have fun. Laughter and joy are not disrespectful. Give yourself and your family members permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holidays in whatever form feels right.