

## ENDURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

*Holidays signify special events and family gatherings. Following the death of a loved one, this time of the year can be both painful and overwhelming. So many memories of precious times shared make the loss of a loved one even more difficult to accept. Along our grief journey, the pain becomes less intense and more manageable.*

*Here are some ways to manage this season & relieve some anxiety/stress. Trying to ignore special days or pretend nothing changed creates a huge burden. Stress is relieved if you and the children know what to expect in advance.*

Plan in advance. You may over-schedule to fill time which may lead to exhaustion. Guard against scheduling too many activities. Leave room for quiet & down time.

What we lack at the holidays is what we need the most: silence, solitude, time to reflect, remember, heal and plan some kind of future without our loved one(s).

It is alright to say "No" to holiday parties/events. Holidays are painful. There is a conflict between what we really feel and what we think we should feel.

You may want to avoid triggers: malls, music, decorations.

Let your needs be known, while encouraging others in the family to let you know what they need.

Gifts: Have a friend help with the buying; give \$; give gift certificates; shop from catalogues; shop early; shop on-line.

Take care of your physical, spiritual and emotional needs: take a vacation; go for a walk; get enough sleep; see a movie, read a book or get a message; exercise; it is okay to question spirituality; think of neutral places to spend time~ arts garden, museums.

Cards: It is okay not to send cards or to send a Mid-winter greeting instead. Ask friends/relatives to come over the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> week after Thanksgiving & sign cards for you. Have everyone over for a pitch-in and everyone takes turns signing cards.

Your children: Children may act out their feelings because they are unable to talk about them. They are not intentionally misbehaving. They just may not know how to tell you in words how they are feeling. This might appear through moodiness, demanding, and irritability, whining, clinging, or throwing tantrums.

Be aware of your children's thought process about the holiday. Because you seem sad, they may think they should feel the same way...they may be worried when they don't. They may feel guilty looking forward to the holiday.

Traditions:

- You do not have to stick with traditions. You may create new ones.
- Talk with your family. What were the traditions like with your loved one and how will they be different without them?
- Find out which traditions your family wants to continue and which ones they want to change.
- Involve children in decision making if you decide to change a traditions (i.e. offer choices). Children need to feel included. Children need to know if things are going to be different (surprises are difficult).
- Go out to eat instead of making the meal or ask for help.
- You can choose a different time of day to open gifts or not even open gifts on that day.
- Buy a gift to give a person in need/nursing home in memory of the person who died.
- Kids can make a Christmas stocking for the person who died- it can be filled w/ messages about the past year, homemade gifts, or a special Christmas wish. You may choose to put flowers in the stocking to take to the cemetery or place in a keepsake book.
- Light a special candle each night of the holiday.
- Make luminaries in honor of your person's memory.
- Make a wreath together to take to the cemetery.
- Display a flower in honor of your loved one.
- Plant a tree (in lieu of putting up a tree).
- Invite children to decorate a tree outdoors for the birds.
- Choose a personal belonging or buy something that represents the loved one to give as a present. This gives the child something tangible to hold on to.
- Spend time together w/family photo albums or make a collage w/ pictures, written messages, clippings, anything special... frame & hang on the wall.