

Celebrating Holidays after a Loss

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The holidays can be a particularly difficult time for those who have lost a loved one. Holidays are usually a time of joy and celebration, a time to come together with family and friends to share traditions and to make warm memories. After a loss, the holidays may instead feel cold and lonely. What was once a happy season now serves as a painful reminder that your loved one is not here to share it with you. You may not feel like celebrating at all. You may wish you could just shut out all the hustle and bustle around you and skip the holidays all together. What's worse, just when you are at your lowest, you may even feel pressure from others to, "get in the spirit," and celebrate anyway.

When everyone else is filled with the holiday spirit, it can make us feel isolated in our grief; like there is no one who understands how we feel. You may feel all alone, but rest assured that there are many other grieving people out there who are going through the same struggle. Since we cannot simply make the holidays disappear, here are some tips for how to get through them this year.

Make a plan. Sit down with your family and discuss how you will celebrate the holidays this year. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to express what things are most important to them, and what things might be difficult. Having an open discussion in advance can help eliminate the potential stresses and hurt feelings of having different expectations for the holiday season.

Do things a little differently this year. Not all holiday traditions have to be kept exactly the same. Decide which things are special and important to you, and which you could do without. And remember, what you choose to do this year, you can always do differently next year.

Understand your needs, and make them known. Don't feel like you are letting anyone down by making some changes to your usual holiday schedule or traditions. Know what you need to help you make it through this difficult time, and make those needs clear to your friends and family. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Realize your limitations. All the holiday hustle and bustle can be exhausting. Maybe this year it's too overwhelming to have holiday dinner at your house, or to spend lots of time picking out gifts. Don't push yourself too hard. Consider some ways to lighten the load, like asking another family member to host dinner, or giving gift cards.

Honor your loved one's memory. The holidays will never be exactly the same as they were before you lost your loved one. Creating a new holiday tradition to remember and pay tribute to your loved one is a good way to embrace the future as well as acknowledge the special place your loved one will always hold in your heart and mind. Here are some suggestions:

- Light a candle at meal time in memory of your loved one, or hang a special ornament on the tree.
- Make a donation to a favorite charity in your loved one's honor.
- Share stories about your loved one, maybe reminiscing about special moments from holidays past.
- Give a special gift of a framed photograph of your loved one to another grieving friend or family member who will cherish it.
- Bring your loved one's favorite food to holiday dinner, and include their name in the blessing.
- Spend the holidays helping those who are less fortunate. Volunteer at a local soup kitchen or other charitable organization.

Above all, be patient with yourself. Don't expect too much of yourself. Make time to rest and take care of yourself, emotionally and physically. Be understanding of the fact that you are going through a very difficult time in your life, and you deserve the time and space you need to deal with your loss in whatever way is best for you. Instead of a time of stress, let the holidays be a time of peace and renewal. Who knows, maybe you will even find some unexpected moments of joy this holiday season, points of light in the darkness of your grief.