

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Accept that the holidays will be different this year. There will be times when you feel sad, lonely, and overwhelmed. Give yourself permission to cry and miss your loved one. If we expect the holidays to be the same as they always were, we will add to our hurt and disappointment. Shift from a focus on joy and celebration to comfort, remembrance, and meaning.

Plan Ahead. One of the most difficult things about grief is the loss of control and predictability over our emotions. We also may have a hard time concentrating, getting organized, and remembering. By planning ahead, we may experience less stress because we know better what to expect.

Anticipation can be worse. Many grieving people find that the *dread* of a major holiday may be more stressful than the actual day itself.

Set realistic expectations for the holidays. Your energy and motivation may be low this year; focus and concentration are compromised. Accept your limitations and learn to say, “No.” Use a holiday checklist to decide which activities are important to you and your family this year. Keep it simple.

Set realistic goals. Prioritize holiday tasks and pace yourself. Make a list of what you would like to do, prioritize the items, and ask for help. Set a timetable for doing those things that are most important to you. Tackle one small task each day – don’t let yourself become overwhelmed.

Try something new. Give yourself permission to do some things differently this holiday season. Decide with family and friends which traditions to keep this year, which to change, and which new ones to add. Does your family go out to dinner this Thanksgiving instead of coming to your house? Do you put up a smaller tree? Skip decorating outside? Send fewer cards? Do less baking? Skip emotional Christmas hymns? Give gift cards instead of shopping for presents? Create a New Year’s ritual to express your hopes for the new year?

Take care of yourself. A grieving body is more fatigued and susceptible to illness and accidents. We need rest, nourishment, and hydration. Gently exercise, eat a well-balanced diet, drink plenty of water, avoid alcohol and drug use, and schedule plenty of down-time.

Surround yourself with supportive people. You need people around you who understand your grief and are comfortable with your sorrow. Seek connection with family and friends who will provide comfort, distraction, remembrance, and help over the holidays.

Find time for yourself. You also need time to grieve and to be alone with your thoughts and feelings. You may need time to withdraw from the world to rest, renew, reflect, and remember. Find a balance by carving out time alone *and* time with others. Use your alone time to rest, journal, pray, watch an old movie, sort photos, or read something inspirational. In the midst of our pain, we must give ourselves permission to find moments of comfort, peace, and even joy.

Grief Counseling Center