

# Living Through Grief

## Coping with the Holidays

If you are like most recently bereaved people, you probably feel the holiday season should be outlawed or at the very least canceled until you are ready to deal with it. The purpose of this publication in the grief information series is to prepare you for the holiday season. Included are thoughts on what to expect, tips on how to cope with all the festivities that surround you, a worksheet, and a suggested reading list.

## Handling Grief through the Holidays

In spite of what most people say, everyone does not look forward to the holidays. Having lost someone through death, you may dread this holiday season. You may wish you could just snap your fingers and it would be over.

Holidays often magnify the feeling of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that you feel.

Keeping a positive memory of your loved one may help to lessen your sadness.

Even though no one can take away your pain, you can do some things to make the holidays less stressful. By following some of the suggestions, in this publication, you can take positive steps toward feeling better.

# Tips For Coping With the Holidays

## Plan ahead

- Realize this year will be different
- Do not let the holidays take you by surprise
- Decide which things need to get done and which things you can let go
- Family get-together may be extremely difficult. To be honest with each other about your feelings.
- Sit down with your family and decide what you want to do for the holiday season.
- Do not set expectations too high for yourself or the day. If you expect things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed.
- Do things a little differently.
- Do only what each family member can handle comfortably
- There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions while others may choose to change.
- Realize it may not be easy to set limits for yourself. Do only those things that are very special or important to you. What you choose to do the first year, you do not have to do the next.

## Let Your Needs Be Known

- Once you have made decisions on how you and/or your family spend the holidays, let other relatives and friends know about them.
- If you need help in making a meal, ask. If you need a shoulder to lean on, ask.
- Do not be afraid to express your thoughts and feelings. Remember, your family and friends cannot read your mind.

## Develop One or More Ways to Cope

- There will be rough times and days. Decide what your stress reducers will be: taking hot baths or long walks; doing deep breathing exercises; calling a friend; listening to music; doing handiwork or craftwork, etc.

## Watch Your Physical Health

- Make sure you get extra rest and eat well. Overdoing can lead to total physical and mental exhaustion. You have to deal with; be kind to yourself.
- It is ok to say no to invitations. It may be difficult to predict your feelings and energy levels, so it is also okay to change your mind at the last minute about attending dinners, parties, and religious services, or about leaving them early. You must be your own guide.

## Help Someone Else

- Although you are going through a difficult time in your life, you are also growing in compassion and understanding for others. Helping someone else may give meaning to your loss.

## Ideas to Think About

- Start a new tradition such as planting a tree in your loved one's memory or lighting a candle in honor of your loved one.
- Include the deceased in your conversations and celebrations
- Hang a stocking for your loved one in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings.
- Look at photographs.
- Once others realize that you are comfortable talking about your loved one, they can relate stories that will add to your pleasant memories.
- Change the times, locations and/or menus of traditional meals. Or get rid of them all together.
- Decorate differently, have someone else decorate, decorate exactly the same way as always, or do not decorate at all.
- Open gifts at a different time than you did before. You are the only guide to what is best.
- Break large tasks into small pieces. Do not be afraid to ask for help.
- If you wish to go away for the holidays, do so. This year, you must do what is right for you. Remember, though you will never you will take your grief with you.
- Find something, some small thing, that is special to you; or do something you have never done before. Try to give your own life a degree of meaning and value no matter how bad you are feeling.
- Do something for others; volunteer at a soup kitchen; visit the lonely and shut-ins; ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family; provide help for a needy family; or offer to volunteer in a hospital on the holiday.

## My Plan for Coping with the Holiday Season

Goals I have for this holiday:

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Things I do not need to do this holiday season:

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Things I want to do this holiday season:

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My plan for coping with the day of the holiday:

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Suggested Reading List

How will I Get Through the Holidays?

By James Miller

Willowgreen Publishing 1996

Holiday Help: A guide for Hope and Healing

By Darcie Sims

Accord Inc., 1996