



Suggestions for Handling the Holidays and Special Days

Holidays and special days like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and the anniversary of your loved one's death can be difficult. Here are some suggestions that may be helpful:

1. Allow yourself to feel your emotions on your special day; don't feel that you need to just "get over it." You may want to write them down in a journal or draw them on paper. Take time for reflection.
2. Call a friend and see if she or he can spend some of the day with you. You may feel like getting out of the house, going out for dinner, or having a picnic. Call a friend who is a good listener.
3. Take time and share memories with your family of the loved one who died.
 - light a candle in honor of her or him
 - set out a picture and tell stories of her or his life
 - watch a home video together
 - look through a photo album together or make a family memory book
4. Plan ahead to help you set limits and do what is meaningful for you and your family during the holidays. You may want to ask yourself:
 - "Is this something I do out of habit or do I really enjoy it?"
 - "Can I share the job with someone else?"
(Example: Decorating your home can be taken over by an older child or maybe a niece or nephew.)
 - "Who will take over the role traditionally assigned to the person who died?" (Example: carving the turkey or ham)
 - "Can someone else do my gift shopping?"
 - "Do I want to exchange gifts at Christmas with my friends and relatives or is there another day like Thanksgiving or Epiphany that would be easier?"
 - "Can someone else help with the housecleaning or could I even afford someone to come in and clean the house?"
 - "Can I send out Christmas cards at Epiphany?" (Note: If you do send out Christmas cards and not everyone has heard of your loved one's death, insert a memorial card to let them know.) You may want to plan ahead and

work on Christmas cards gradually: address the envelopes in October, stuff them in November, and send them out just after Thanksgiving.

- "Should I buy some new clothes?"

5. Try the following cooking ideas for the holidays:

- reduce the number of dishes you make
- ask your guests to bring a dish to share
- go to someone else's house for dinner
- go out to eat

6. Be open to good experiences that the holidays may bring. Live in the present. Remember, past holidays weren't perfect.

7. Don't avoid long-standing traditions. Children often find comfort in them. On the other hand, new traditions say you are still a family.

8. Provide your children with extra amounts of attention, praise, and emotional support.

9. Children imitate behavior. If they see you are crying and expressing your sadness at the death of your loved one, they will know they have the freedom to do the same.

10. Do something for someone else. Reaching out to someone else who is in need can help with your feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Give a donation in memory of your loved one. Give food to the needy. Invite someone else who is alone to join in the holiday meal and festivities.

11. Allow yourself to feel joy. You are not betraying your loved one. You may want to read the following books for more ideas:

Carpenter, P. *Away for the Holidays*. PCA Publishing, P.O. Box 16066, Minneapolis, MN 55416, 1-612-927-5270.

Conley, B. *Handling the Holidays*. Thum Printing, P.O. Box A, Elburn, IL 60119, 1-312-365-6414.

Miller, J. *How Will I Get Through the Holidays? 12 Ideas For Those Whose Loved One Has Died*. Willowgreen Publishing, 1996.