

Holiday Hints from the Children's Bereavement Center

The Holiday Season is sometimes difficult and often filled with emotional stressors, even during the best of times. For those of us who have suffered the death of a loved one, the holidays may seem especially complicated and can be filled with ambivalence and mixed emotions. Anticipation of a new experience, like the first holiday after a death, or familiar rituals that remind us of our loved ones, can be overwhelming.

There is no right or wrong way to deal with the holidays. We must each decide what feels best and is most comforting for ourselves and our family. First and foremost, try to be kind to yourself. Follow your instincts and desires. Although some people find comfort in speaking with a supportive friend or confidante, this may not be what you find helpful. If you do choose to share your experience with others, try to include your loved one's name in conversation and recollect past holidays and joys. Memories are a connection to the deceased, and do not have to be seen as negative. Cherish and embrace the treasure of your memories.

Many bereaved families have found unique, and meaningful, ways of remembering their loved one during the holiday season. Here are some ideas which have helped others and may provide additional support.

- Plan ahead. Create new traditions, or choose to embrace the old as a way to stay connected.
- Involve children in creating new rituals and traditions.
- Finding the support of others can help to balance the sense of isolation and loneliness that grief brings.
- Serve your loved one's favorite food.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings.
- Maintain a memorial light or candle.
- Dedicate a bench, tree, or star in their name.
- Publish a memorial note or poem in the newspaper or a newsletter.
- Make a special time to look at photos or videos.
- Donate in your loved one's name.
- Allow some quiet time, take a walk, and indulge in positive memories.
- Give yourself permission to feel, at times/places that are convenient for you.
- Forgive yourself if you are unable to function at your top level. Ask for help if needed.
- Do only what you can - it's OK to change how you celebrate.

Remember, that by being understanding, patient and gentle with yourself you will continue to adjust and maintain a continued bond of love and memory for the person who has died. There is no magic to handling the holidays. Try to remember: be kind to yourself.

Our best and warmest wishes this holiday season, and throughout the coming year.