

you. If you have teenagers or young adults on your list, they'll probably be thrilled to receive a monetary gift from you and do their own shopping. If you must shop, consider going early and having the gifts wrapped for you.

Consider not sending or cutting back on your holiday cards this year. It is not necessary to send cards, especially to those people you will see over the holidays. You might consider sending a holiday letter sharing your loss and your appreciation of those who were there for you.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the

sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved one alive.



As you gather with those you choose to spend the holidays with, why not light a candle in memory of the person who died and take a few moments to share some special memories?

Emotionally, physically, and psychologically, the holidays can take a lot out of you. You'll need every bit of strength and you don't want to get sick, so take care of yourself. Try to get plenty of rest.

LOOKING FORWARD

Often, after the first year, the people in your life may expect you to be "over it." We are never "over it," but the experience of many bereaved is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold on to the HOPE!



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Coping with the Holidays

*Navigating your way through the holiday
season: a guide for the grieving*

Provided by:





How can you make it through the holidays? Here are some suggestions that have helped others...

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Family get-togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about what you want to do. Talk about what's important to each person and what traditions you might choose not to observe this year. Remember, you can always bring them back later. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or the day. If you wish things to be the same, you're going to be disappointed. If you have young children, keep in mind that certain things may be very important to them and that much of the focus may need to be on them.

Be with people you find supportive and comforting. Try to identify those people around you who understand that the holiday season heightens your feeling of loss and allow you to talk about your loved one. You don't need to be around people that want you to be miserable, however, you also don't need to be around people who want you to maintain a "happy face." Find those people that accept you and encourage you to simply think and

feel whatever it is you think and feel. Once you have decided how you and your family will spend the holidays, let your other relatives and friends know.

RELEASING OBLIGATIONS

Be careful of "shoulds" – it is better to do what you feel is most helpful for you and your family. If a situation looks especially difficult over the holidays, try not to get involved. Don't take on too much. Realize that it isn't going to be easy and set limits for yourself so that you don't get too stressed out. Just do the best you can and don't try to please everyone. You can't.

CHANGING PLANS

One possibility for the first year may be to visit relatives, friends, or even go away on a vacation. Planning, packing, etc., helps keep your mind focused on other things besides the holiday. Spending the holiday in a different, and hopefully less painful, setting can be just what you need. If you feel you need to be home for Thanksgiving or Christmas Day, you might want to make plans to leave the next morning.

If you are accustomed to having dinner at your home, ask a family member or friend to have it instead this year. Or, you could change the time of the meal. Instead of eating at noon,



have the meal in the early evening. Some find it helpful to be involved in the activity of preparing a meal. Serving buffet-style, changing the menu, or eating in a different room can also help.

BAKING AND DECORATING

Baking and decorating the house can easily get out of proportion and add to your stress. If these things are enjoyable to you and it helps you to keep busy in this way, go ahead, but not to the point that they become tiring. This year you could cut back on your decorations, and buy baked goods or go without.

If you used to cut your own tree, consider buying it already cut this year.

Let your children, other family members, neighboring teens, friends, or people from your church help decorate the tree and house. If you choose not to have a tree, perhaps you could make a centerpiece from lower branches of a tree, buy a ceramic tree, or a small tabletop tree.



GIFTS AND CARDS

Shopping for gifts can be stressful in the best of circumstances. You might want to avoid going to the malls, since they can contribute to your feeling of aloneness. Why not consider giving gift certificates or shopping by catalog this year? Another nice gift might be tickets to a concert or play that you could go to also. If you have grandchildren to shop for, you might ask your children to shop for