

## **Coping with Holidays**

Holidays can be very difficult for families and friends who have lost a loved one to murder. Here are some suggestions that you might find helpful in dealing with this time of year. Some things that work for others might not work for you so do what you are comfortable with, and let me know if you have suggestions that are not included here.

You are experiencing not only the loss of your loved one, but the loss of the life you shared with them. Holidays bring about a sharp reminder of what you have lost. You are grieving also for the way these events are forever altered.

It is not wrong for you to feel angry, sad, or overwhelmed by impending holidays. Because you are not able to control these changes, you are bound to have feelings that conflict with what you used to feel during holidays. If others around you are not feeling the same, you may feel further alienated. What used to make you happy and joyous may now make you feel sad and angry.

**DO** sit down with family members and discuss what each member wants to do for the holidays. Expect that there may be some conflicts and be prepared to talk it out.

**DO** remember to let others know. Your friends and other relatives will honor your decisions, but they need to know what they are.

**DON'T** do things that you are uncomfortable with just because you think it is expected of you. Consider and suggest compromises.

**DON'T** forget that others are hurting too. Be particularly mindful of the children in your family.

**DO** plan ahead and *prioritize*. Do things that are very important or especially significant to you - leave the rest for later.

**DO** expect to have pain...it is unavoidable. When those moments come, don't run from them; just let them happen and then move on.

**DON'T** be afraid to change traditions that make you sad, but **DO** try to keep some.

**DO** buy a small gift for your loved one - then give it to someone who might otherwise be without a gift.

**DO** consider setting a place at the holiday table for your loved one - perhaps leave a single flower or a lit a candle on their plate.

**DON'T** get tangled up in semantics - it is the natural inclination for people to say "Happy New Year - Merry Christmas - Happy Hanukkah". Don't be hurt by this.

DO remember that it is "okay" if you choose to be alone - no one else knows what is best for you.

DO consider creating new traditions - they may become as special as old traditions in time.

DON'T succumb to the urge to "spend away your grief." It won't help and it will only cause financial problems.

DO try shopping online. You will avoid over-exposure to holiday decorations, songs, etc.

DO seek out others who may be experiencing similar problems - you may help them as you help yourself.

DON'T overwhelm yourself as you try to get in a holiday mood. In the earliest years after a loss, it may be better to re-introduce participation slowly. Understand that the holidays will not be the same, ever.

DO take good care of yourself. Remember to eat properly, take vitamins, get as much sleep as possible, etc.

DO consider hanging a Christmas stocking for your loved one, and ask family members to write a special memory of your loved one and put it in the stocking. You could read them together on Christmas Day or New Year's Day, or choose never to read them at all.

DON'T think of tears as a bad thing. Those tears are helping you to heal.

DO share your feelings with your loved ones. If you are not comfortable with something, tell your family why you feel that way.

DO consider placing some decoration at the gravesite. A small wreath or decorated tree might be appropriate.

DON'T feel guilty if you enjoy yourself! Your loved one would not want you to forever grieve, pushing all joy from your life. If you find yourself laughing, or enjoying holiday preparations, you are not insulting your loved one's memory, rather uplifting it.

DO accept invitations to social events, while telling the host/hostess that you may feel compelled to cancel at the last minute or to leave early. Try to participate socially if you feel ready but understand that you may find unexpected limitations.

DO consider going to Christmas services at your church; you might try a different service time from normal or even a different church.

DO make a donation in your loved one's memory.

DO seek out a support group in your area, or participate in our online support group. It can be very helpful to share your feelings with others who understand.

DO write a letter to your loved one, sharing your feelings and memories. This can be very cathartic.

DO remember that January may possibly bring on more depression than the holidays did. After the holidays are over, the dreary coldness of January may leave you with even more tendency to dwell on things that make you sad. Knowing this is the best way to avoid it.

## Managing Grief at Christmas

### Ideas for coping with Christmas

Christmas may mean family and traditions, and everybody being together. Often, these gatherings remind us of our loved ones who are no longer with us. It may be a difficult time and everyone reacts differently. It may be that people react more sensitively to things. Everyone has their own way of coping. It is important that you look after yourself and have your way of getting through these difficult times. Here are some ideas that may help you better manage the Christmas holidays.

**Allow yourself to be sad** – Christmas may have been a time you spent with someone dear to you. It is normal to feel sad that they are not with you. It may help to take some time out, to remember the person you love.

You may want to:

- Find ways to incorporate memories of your loved ones into the holiday traditions.
- Start a new tradition.
- Do something that you used to do together.
- Write a letter to the person.
- Revisit that favorite spot you had.
- Share some of the memories.

**It is OK to enjoy yourself** – It may be difficult to celebrate when you are missing someone you love. It is not uncommon to have different feelings such as sadness, guilt or excitement. Getting together with family and close friends may be a chance to remember the good times and it is OK to relax and have a laugh. Having fun is not necessarily a sign that you miss that person any less.

**Look after yourself** – Remembering that this may be a tough time for you is important. This may mean that you have to treat yourself with a bit of care. If possible, treat yourself to something you enjoy doing.

It may be that you:

- Relax at home with a book.
- Take time out for a nap.
- Go for a walk.

- Listen to music.
- Go shopping.
- Have a massage.
- Visit friends.
- Make an effort to eat two balanced meals a day.
- Be flexible, leave yourself open for changes and have tentative plans.

**Talk to someone** – Having someone you trust to talk to about how you are feeling may be helpful. This may be a family member, friend or youth worker. If you are finding it hard to cope with day-to-day items then it may help to talk to a counselor or your doctor.

**Avoid holding your feelings in** – Grieving is a normal and healthy step in dealing with loss. Keeping things to yourself may mean that the tension builds up inside you. Finding a way to get out what you are feeling may help you to feel better.

You may like to:

- Talk to someone.
- Write down your thoughts, draw.
- Cry or punch some pillows.
- Let yourself feel the pain.

Grieving does hurt. We just need to allow ourselves to express the various feelings. It does get better.

*Doris Rose Audet*

## Grief and the Holidays

*From: Marie*

With the winter holidays approaching I wanted to share one thing that made a big difference for me last year in coping with Christmas. At the suggestion of our art therapist, we made ornaments using photos and photocopies of photos with Don (my deceased husband) in them. We used some that were just him, some with one or another of us and him, and a family picture. We got out ribbon, glitter, sequins, glue and I don't remember what else – your basic collage materials and went to town. It was very therapeutic – it brought Don into our Christmas. We hung some of the ornaments on the tree, we gave some to other family members including his mother, and we used some for decorations around the house. It was very simple, yet very meaningful. Before that, I hadn't found a way to incorporate him into our celebrations. Wishing you all the best of holiday celebrations!



## *My Gifts to Me on Christmas Mourning*

My gift to me is to acknowledge that the anticipation of any holiday can often be much worse than the actual event.

My gift to me is to acknowledge my wish list: to put up a tree-if I wish; to send cards-if I wish; to have our traditional Christmas-if I wish; to go on a holiday-if I wish.

My gift to me is to admit that I won't always have to celebrate the holidays this way, but for the time being, this is how I must cope.

My gift to me is to be aware that the sights, sounds, smells and music of the holiday season may bring "grief bursts". This is OK. This is my tribute to my dead loved one.

My gift to me is to take care of me and allow myself to have some "time-out" and indulge in an emotional and spiritual retreat.

My gift to me is to remember something special about the one who died and share that memory with others who support me.

My gift to me is to disallow others to force me into doing things I don't want to do; I will not let them "should" on me.

My gift to me is to talk about happy memories and good times past, and laugh if I want. Having a good time does not mean that I have forgotten the one I love.

My gift to me is to not numb myself with excessive eating, drinking, or drugs, or harm myself or others, if an emotional crisis occurs; I will turn to those who love me.

My gift to me is to surround myself with those who appreciate, understand and respect my need to seek harmony and well being during this season of peace on earth.