

# Coping with the Holidays

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Holidays are times when people may remember the past and wonder about the future. When there has been a death in the family, the emotional wounds that are left can ache during these times of warmth and cheer. Feelings of isolation and loneliness can magnify. It is possible to get through these times with planning and forethought.

Realize this is a different holiday this year, unlike past holidays. If you are used to a big Christmas dinner with all its grand decorations, you might want to simplify it this year. It is difficult enough to learn to live with that empty chair. Be with family on Christmas day. During prayers before or after your Christmas meal, acknowledge the absence of your loved one by mentioning how much he or she is missed. Visit the cemetery and light a candle. Engage in religious activities that you find comforting. Don't be afraid to cry – or to smile, perhaps even laugh.

When one is acutely grieving it is difficult to find energy to do things. Nonetheless, it is important that you try to initiate activity yourself; do not wait for others. Plan your own holiday. Make phone calls to your friends or relatives. Calls to people in similar circumstances can also be comforting. Follow through with activities.

If your spouse died, remember that ONE is a whole number. You need not be a part of a couple to enjoy yourself. Time spent by yourself can be rewarding. To those who have lost a child, Christmas can be especially painful. Christmas, among other things, is for children. Children are our hopes for the future and to parents who have lost a child; it is also a loss of a future. Although your child can never be replaced, do not forget your other children. They need you as well, perhaps more than ever. If there is extra room in your heart, invite a disadvantaged child to dinner. Above all, do things because you want to do them, not because your loved one “would have wanted it that way.” Do what you are comfortable doing.

Be gentle with yourself. All wounds take time to heal. Realize you will feel sad a lot of the time. Take time to identify and take care of your needs. Get adequate rest and exercise. Guard against overuse of the following substances: sugar, caffeine and alcohol. They are plentiful in the holiday season.

Remember that healing is not a destination. It is a journey. Look at the holiday season as the start of a new life.

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