

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES FOR GRIEVING FAMILIES

It is the holiday season once again. For grieving children and their families, holidays can often bring more sorrow than joy. Here are a few activities to help get through those difficult days and moments. Remember, the more that children are actively involved in their own grief process, the greater the opportunity for healing.

1. Get a big empty undecorated gift box. Decorate the box with colorful paper, bows, or perhaps cover the box with a photo collage. You can get color Xerox copies if you don't want to damage the original photos. The box should be wrapped so that the top can be removed. Family members can place pieces of paper into the box that tells how the deceased was a gift to them. They can share how the person made them feel, things he or she did for them to help or support them, or something they learned from the person. Children can also draw pictures to express their thoughts. An alternative theme can be that every family member writes down or draws about a favorite memory of their loved one. On Christmas morning, the box can be opened, and the thoughts and memories shared. This sets apart a special time to remember your loved one and make them a part of your holiday. It is important for families to be able to express how much they still love and care about family members even after a death occurs.
2. Make a large family photo collage, including pictures with the deceased loved one. Display the collage along with holiday decorations in a special place, perhaps by the tree or the dinner table.
3. Make a toast at dinner in honor of their memory. As you make the toast, give everyone at the table a chance to say something, or perhaps share what they miss about not having them there for the holiday. If you want to, make the toast as if you are directly speaking to the person. For example, "Merry Christmas, honey. We sure miss you. You always made the best pumpkin pie..."
4. Light a special candle and place it on the dinner table. After everyone sits down, acknowledge that the candle is being lit to honor the life of your deceased loved one. You may want to add a sentiment such as: "His/Her love will burn brightly in our hearts forever." Perhaps you would like to say a special prayer.
5. A few days before the holiday, set up a small table. This will be a "memory table." On the table are placed various remembrances of the deceased: a photo, a card from the deceased, or perhaps a gift or memento received from the loved one. These memory tables are great because contributors to the table do not have to say much. The

objects speak for themselves, but can also stimulate warm conversations about the person.

6. Write or draw about past holiday. Create stories about past holiday memories. Write a poem about the person. Share these stories, pictures, poems, and memories over hot chocolate or eggnog on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, or Christmas morning.
7. Give a monetary gift to a charitable organization in remembrance of your loved one. Have the children raise money from friends and neighbors, or let them earn money by doing chores. This way they feel a sense of importance that they helped personally contribute to the donation. Perhaps the children could collect non-perishable items from a women's or homeless shelter.
8. Visit the cemetery. Bring a holiday wreath or other decoration. Read a poem, or sing a holiday song, or say a special prayer. Let your child decide what he or she would like to do.
9. Create holiday ornaments for the tree that memorializes the deceased. Make the ornament by cutting circles out of colored felt and gluing the person's picture in the middle. Add glitter and string it on a piece of yarn. Or you can buy clear plastic ornaments at a craft store that pop in half. Fill the ornament with small mementos. You can also take a plain bulb and write your loved one's name on it with glue, and just add glitter.
10. Buy clothing, or donate your loved one's clothing to a nursing home resident, or the poor. Perhaps you can visit the people whom the gifts were given to. This is a beautiful and caring way to honor your loved one's memory. Doing something for others during the holiday season helps us feel good, take the focus off ourselves for a short time, and help us appreciate the blessing that are still present in our lives.