

# Surviving the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families grieving the death of a child. Below are some helpful suggestions that may aid you in surviving the holidays.

- 1) Call a family member and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed.
- 2) Well intended friends and family may want to include you in their plans, believing it best for you to "get away" from grieving and loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel. There is no obligation to say "yes." Only participated if you truly want to.
- 3) Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and drink properly, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- 4) Take time to do the things you as a person want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
- 5) Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking, and baking that you may normally enjoy. People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
- 6) If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them over the Internet or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
- 7) Many families that are in mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their child to buy gifts for a child who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
- 8) It is not unusual for you to want to include your child during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your child to send you a story about your child that you may not have known; Ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your child so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it was your tradition, include placing a stocking with those of other children in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others – this is a symbolic gesture in memory of your child.
- 9) If you have other children who normally celebrate the holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
- 10) Consider attending a memorial event. Most families find some comfort by being with others who have experienced loss.
- 11) Remember that the anticipation of a holiday is often worse than the holiday itself.
- 12) Be kind to yourself.
- 13) It is okay to cry.