



Hope for the Holidays

"I don't know what to do for the holidays..."

"Just the thought of the day is overwhelming..."

"I wish I could just skip it and not even worry with it this year..."

Holidays can be particularly difficult when we are grieving the death of someone special in our lives. The bright lights, colorful decorations and celebrating people can be a stark contrast to the way we might be feeling inside. Quite often the days leading up to these special occasions are daunting, as we anticipate their arrival. Yet, even though holidays might be mentally and emotionally difficult, they can still be a source of inspiration and hope in the midst of your grief.

These are just a few thoughts to keep in mind during your holidays or special occasions. The common theme to all of these ideas is that our choices matter. How and with whom we choose to spend our time during the holidays directly impacts our wellbeing. Remember, just as each person's grief is unique, the way you view and desire to spend the holidays are just as

unique. But some choices are healthier for us than others. Though it may be difficult to face the holidays in the shadow of grief, it is important that we accept responsibility for our own choices and how we choose to spend our time.

Take these suggestions into consideration as you enter the holiday season, and remember that there is no right or wrong way to experience the holidays.



Make a Plan

Having a plan for special days or holidays can help you establish some type of control over the day. Someone once said, "Either you control the day or the day controls you." Your plan might include any of the subsequent suggestions, from spending time with family, making time to be alone or participating in a memorial activity. Whatever you choose to do on that day, decide ahead

of time what will be your plan and stick with it.



Make an Alternate Plan

Though it is important to make a plan and follow it, be sure that you also plan an alternative or some way to "retreat" from family gatherings or other plans that might become too overwhelming. Having a "plan B" can help you continue to maintain a level of control, even if you do not follow your original plan completely.



Find Comfort in Holiday Rituals

Family rituals become imbedded in the celebration of holidays. These rituals can

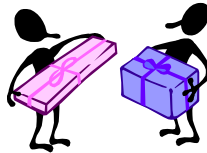
highlight the absence of someone who has died and not be easy for us, but they are important connections that can nurture us during difficult times. Family rituals connect us with those around us who love us and want the best for us. The rituals are often connected to childhood experiences and have the potential to bring renewal and hope even in the midst of our anguish. Though the thought of participating in these rituals may be painful, if possible, it can be helpful to “push through” that heartache and participate with family rituals in spite of our grief.



Establish New Holiday Rituals

When a significant person dies and their presence is highlighted during a holiday, many families have found it helpful to create new rituals that memorialize those who have died. Many families have shared that they light candles in memory of family and friends who have died; others purchase gifts on their behalf and give them to someone in need; and sharing stories about the person who died are just a few ways we can honor the memory of someone special in our life during the holidays. These new rituals, many times, helps make

the holidays a source of joy and something to look forward to rather than something to dread.



Spend Time with Family or Friends

Family and friends can be an anchor for us during hard times. Yet, quite often, in our grief, we find ourselves pushing those close to us away. This can be especially true during the holidays. Though we might find it difficult to be with family, it is important for us to continue to nurture these relationships. Many people have shared that they were dreading the large family gathering, but once they got there, they had a good time and were glad they went.



Do Something Completely Different

Some people have found it helpful to do something completely different during holidays. Planning to spend time with new friends, or taking a trip to a new place can be refreshing. It is important to keep in mind that visiting new or exciting places will not

propel you beyond the pain of grief. We still must work through our grief no matter where we might spend the holidays. However, sometimes a change of scenery can give us the opportunity to experience a connection to the world around us in a new and fresh way.



Help Someone Else

A great way to refocus our energy during the holidays is to help someone else. As we center our attention on the needs of others, we often help ourselves in the process. There are a variety of things we can do to make a difference during the holidays. We have had families share that they helped serve food to the homeless, baked goodies for neighbors, bought clothes for children in need or provided volunteer hours for a local charity.

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