



MAKING HOLIDAYS MEANINGFUL FOR CHILDREN AFTER SOMEONE YOU CARE ABOUT DIES

Although a family member or friend has died, you and your children can still enjoy the holiday season with some advance planning and open communication. Keeping in mind that children look to you as a role model of how to grieve, setting the example of it being okay to talk about your loved one who died may be the social cue they are looking for to express their needs and wants during the holiday season.

Of all the holidays in a calendar year, few evoke as many thoughts and feelings as those that begin on Thanksgiving and end on New Years' day. Families who are grieving the death of someone close will be bombarded with images of families and friends gathering around a warm meal, opening presents together, or celebrating with one another into the New Year. These visual and verbal cues imply everyone comes from a happy, close-knit and vibrant family, untouched by the ravages of grief. Other seasonal cues, including the sight of fall foliage or holiday themed scents, may trigger memories and feelings associated with holidays spent with dear, departed family members or friends.

Advanced preparation for this onslaught of both pleasant and unpleasant thoughts may ease the pain and reduce last minute family conflict or individual pain. Grieving family members can begin to communicate their misses and wishes for the coming holiday celebrations around the time Pumpkin patches morph into Christmas tree lots. It is important to include children in these discussions and when decisions are made about how to celebrate this holiday season.

Acknowledge the ways in which the holidays will be different simply because their special person who died will be absent. Some grieving families enjoy continuing long standing traditions even without family members who have departed. If, for example, Grandmother always made the pumpkin pie, identify who, if anyone can make her pie recipe this year. Then be sure and acknowledge Grandmother's absence at the holiday meal. Even young children can participate in a toast to remember and honor those loved ones who have died.

Other grieving families may prefer to do things differently, like vacationing out of town to avoid reminders of the deceased. Other options might include making holiday donations in honor of the deceased. Delivering baked goods or toys to nursing homes and hospitals is another way to make meaning of your loss by striving to improve the lives or celebrations of those who are in need.

All are good solutions as long as everyone's preferences and feelings are considered. Few would disagree that grieving alone and without support is a sad affair for children and adults alike. Regardless of the plans the family agrees upon, the most important step is including even the youngest children in the decision making process.

For additional emotional support or guidance contact OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center.

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1-888-417-1444