

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

HOLIDAY TIME!! The whole world seems consumed with tinsel and glitter –but those who grieve are only aware of the terrible hole in their hearts and in their lives. Knowing the intense pain of the Holiday Season, here are some helpful thoughts which other bereaved persons have shared. We hope they make your holidays a little easier to handle.

Keep in mind that grieving persons have definite limitations: you are not functioning at normal capacity. Therefore, it is helpful to evaluate your priorities and decide what is really meaningful for you and your family.

1. Decide what you can handle comfortably — let these needs be known to your family, friends and relatives:

Whether or not to talk about your loved one.
Whether you can handle the responsibility of the family gathering.
Would you like someone else to take over some of these traditional tasks?

2. Don't be afraid to make changes: It really can make things less painful!

Open presents Christmas Eve instead of Christmas morning.
Have dinner at a different time.
Attend a different church for your Christmas Eve service.
Let the children take over decorating the tree, making cookies, etc.

3. Your greatest comfort could come from doing something for someone else. Some persons feel they can acknowledge their loss more meaningfully by:

Giving a gift in memory of your loved one.
Donating the money you would have spent on your loved one for a gift to a particular charity.
Adopting a needy family for the Holidays.
Inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, etc.) to share in your festivities.

4. Whether it's greeting cards, Holiday baking, putting up the tree, decorating outside, or having a big family dinner, ask these questions before making any decisions.

Have I involved or considered my children?
Do I really enjoy doing this? Do other family members really enjoy doing this?
Is this a task that can be shared by other family members?
WOULD CHRISTMAS BE CHRISTMAS WITHOUT IT?

5. How many stockings shall we hang? We may decide to:

Put them all up.

Hang no stockings at all.

Put thoughts and feelings about our loved one on notes, and place them in that special stocking. Family members are free to read them (a special opportunity for younger children to express feelings).

One family burns a candle on all their Special Days to quietly include their “absent” loved one.

One mother buys a poinsettia for her home as a living memorial to her son for the Holiday Season; another always orders a bouquet of orange daisies.

Shopping may be extremely upsetting. It may help to shop early through a catalog, by phone or to make plans to shop with an understanding friend. Plan to relax over lunch or a cup of coffee.

Friends or relatives might be willing to shop for you if they realize that just the thought of shopping is bothering you. Some people pretend November 25th is Christmas and try to get whatever shopping card writing, etc. done by that date. By shopping now you are able to avoid hearing the Christmas carols, seeing all the decorations and being wished Merry Christmas. You might even find it easier to give gift certificates or checks this year.

REMEMBER TO...

Take one day at a time.

Be realistic –recognize the value in setting limits for yourself and do only those things which are meaningful to you and your family.

Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year.

Growth and change go hand in hand.

And do not forget that comforting discovery that many have confirmed: the realization that when the “Special Day” arrives, it is truly not as bad -by any means -as you anticipated.