

# Handling the Holidays and other Special Days

## Know When Your Holidays Are

Holidays are not just at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah or New Year's. Holidays are those times when families and friends get together for fun. It may or may not be associated with one of the traditional days of celebration. Mark on your calendar the months in which your family's holidays occur. Begin early to plan your coping strategies.

## Decide What You Can Handle Comfortably

Let these needs be known to your family, friends and relatives. Consider the following:

- Whether or not to talk about your loss issues openly.
- Whether you can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc., or if you wish someone else to take over some of these traditions this year.
- Whether you will stay home for the holidays or choose to get away to a totally different holiday environment this year.

## Make A List

One resource in holiday planning can be a list to be drawn up and discussed by all family members of things to be done in preparing for the holidays. This way priorities can be set, some tasks can be shared, some eliminated, and plans made to accomplish those things considered essential. This sharing can demonstrate a recognition of and respect for each family member's values. Don't be afraid to make changes. It can really make things less painful. You may choose to open holiday gifts the night before instead of in the morning, have dinner at a different time, attend a different church for your holiday service, or let the children take over decorating the tree or making cookies.

## Plan A Special Remembrance As Part Of Your Holiday Ritual

Some families burn a special candle to quietly honor their loss. Others may give a gift or donate money to a meaningful charity during a difficult time. It is important to establish new rituals to allow for meaningful expression and celebration of your special family gathering.

# Plan And Share Your Holiday Plans With Others

Shopping is definitely easier if you can make out the entire list ahead of time. Then when one of the "good" days comes along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion. Shopping online, by phone or from catalogs can also help. Examine the events and tasks of the celebration and ask the following questions:

- Have I involved or considered other family members?
- Do I really enjoy doing this? Do other family members enjoy this?
- Is it done out of habit, free choice or obligation?
- Is this a task that can be shared by other family members?
- Have I informed friends and family of intended changes?

## Don't Be Afraid To Have Fun

Enjoyment, laughter and pleasure are not experiences to abandon at times of loss. You need not feel guilty over any enjoyment you may experience. Give yourself and members of your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday.

## Remember:

- Take one day at a time.
- Be realistic. It is most important to recognize that fatigue can lead to feelings of depression under the best of circumstances. Don't over-extend, don't over-commit. Recognize that you need to set limits and do those things that are meaningful to you and your family. Eliminate the unnecessary and reduce the pressures on yourself and others.
- Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to do differently next year. Growth and change go hand in hand.
- If your faith has been an important part of your life, allow time for its expression during these holidays and special days. If it has not, this may be a fitting time to approach the clergyman or church of your choice. In either case, you may find that by enriching and deepening your religious experience, you have added a new dimension to your life.
- Your holidays will be different. It's not a choice of pain or no pain, but how you manage the pain you feel. The important thing to remember is to do what is comfortable for you and your family. Take time to love and let yourself be loved, for this is the real gift of the season.

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