

Grief During the Holidays

Holidays can be a difficult time for people that have had a loss. This loss can be loss of a relationship, loss of health or loss of a loved one.

There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change. When we are already experiencing the great stress of bereavement, the additional strains of the holidays can create unbearable pressure. *The key to coping with grief during the holidays is to find the way that is right for you.*



Suggested ways to prepare in advance:

Plan for the approaching holidays.

Be aware that this might be a difficult time for you. The additional stress may affect you emotionally, cognitively, and physically; this is a normal reaction. It is important to be prepared for these feelings.

Recognize that holidays won't be the same.

If you try to keep everything as it was, you'll be disappointed. Doing things a bit differently can acknowledge the change while preserving continuity with the past.

Be careful not to isolate yourself.

It's okay to take time for yourself, but don't cut yourself off from the support of family and friends.

The holidays may affect other family members.

Talk over your plans. Respect their choices and needs, and compromise if necessary.

Avoid additional stress.

Decide what you really want to do, and what can be avoided.

The following suggestions are for families that have lost a loved one. Bereaved families react in many different ways. When coping with grief during the holidays, it is important to realize that not everyone grieves the same way or finds comfort in the same things. Many families have found comfort in the following suggestions:

Remember the deceased.

Make a holiday donation to a charitable organization in their memory. Decorate the gravesite. Share photos and memories of holidays past. Include the deceased in your conversations and celebrations.

“Grieving is not a process of forgetting but of remembering.” --E. Kubler-Ross

This information has been reviewed and recommended for use by the UAMS/CPED/Patient Education Advisory Committee.

Take care of yourself.

Plan relaxation time. Do things to help you relax such as warm baths, watch movies, read books, play golf or other de-stress activities. Plan to be with the people *you* enjoy. Get plenty of sleep and watch what you eat. Avoid excessive alcohol consumption. Keep a diary or journal of feelings, and how you and the family are coping.

Limit social gatherings.

Choose only to attend the ones that give you the feeling of holiday spirit. Be willing to leave a holiday function early if you become uncomfortable. Be mindful of the needs of children in the family.

Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanza.

Limit decorating to what you and your family feel is important. Send preprinted cards or choose not to send a card this year. Avoid shopping on weekends, shop by catalog, or ask friends to complete the shopping for you. Give gift certificates or money. Open gifts on a different day or a different time. Change your holiday tradition. Create new traditions. Hang a special ornament or light a special candle in memory.

Holiday meals.

Go to a restaurant. Go to someone else's house. Have a different menu. Limit alcohol. Create a different setting.

Do something for others.

Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Visit the lonely and shut-ins. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family. Volunteer at the airport to pour coffee for stranded travelers; or offer to volunteer in a hospital on the holiday. If your city has a Ronald McDonald House, see if you can help make their holiday happier.

Additional Information:

- www.hospicefoundation.org
- www.griefnet.org

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES
4301 West Markham Street - Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

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