

EARLY HOLIDAY INFORMATION FOR AN EASIER HOLIDAY IN GRIEFS FIRST YEAR

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

FOR AUTUMN AND THE HOLIDAY SEASON



“The holiest of all holidays are those kept by ourselves in silence and apart; the secret anniversaries of the heart.” - W.H Longfellow.

Ten Strategies for Easier Holiday Coping

1. KEEP A LOW PROFILE.

Fatigue and loneliness may increase when you keep busy. Pause and gauge yourself. Rest. Grief affects you not just mentally but physically too. Take care of yourself - like you matter. You matter.

2. CREATE NEW TRADITIONS

Rituals from past holidays may magnify your loss. Talk to your family. The best choice for some might be to leave town... for others it would be to stay. Light a candle for your loved one. Mention them at your meal with gratitude.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR LOSS

Grief is a road which no one wants to be on...and everyone wants to get through. It takes time but feeling your way through is the quickest way to move forward: move slowly. Grief is *normal*...but it hurts.



CREATE NEW TRADITIONS



NOURISH YOURSELF



MAKE IT OK TO BE ALONE

4. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.

It bears repeating because it is one of the most important things to remember during your grieving process – especially during the holiday season when our feelings may be more intense.

Matters are made worse

for the bereaved when people go out of their way not to mention the deceased or try to pretend the holiday is like any other. Their greatest fear is that any mention of the dead will cause someone to cry uncontrollably, and the dinner will be ruined. Consider that tears might be part of a nourishing holiday meal or at least not world-shattering.

SOMEONE MAY FIND IT COMFORTING TO MENTION A LOVED ONE'S NAME...JUST MAKE IT SIMPLE AND RESPECTFUL

Plan to mention their name.

If you don't, other people in the family will slip and people are going to feel tense. This reinforces the feeling that mentioning the deceased person is what causes the tears and sadness. Mention the loved one, feel their presence and put everyone at ease. Talk about who will carve the turkey this year or hang the special ornaments on the tree. The moment of recognition makes the bereaved feel less dishonest to be sad in the midst of celebrating.

A Simple Ritual:

If you have been invited to a relative or friend's home you might want to be the one to bring the floral centerpiece with a candle center to light in the name of your loved one.



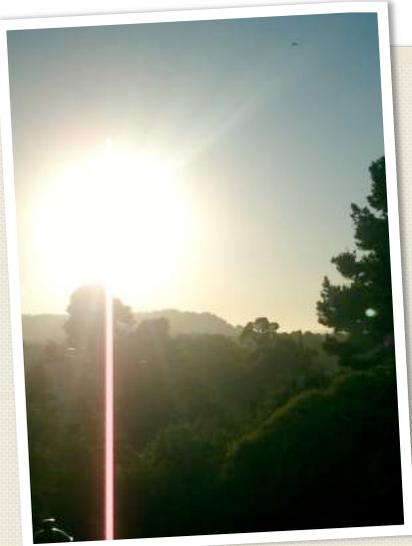
5. LEARN TO LISTEN TO YOU

Your instincts may tell you that today would be a good day to have a friend over for coffee, or that you might skip the big New Year's bash. Learn to pay attention to this inner voice - it's one of the best friends you have. Intuition may lead us to the perfect person or activity for this moment, and can spare us those which are unsatisfying.



6. THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO HANDLE THESE DAYS

You may want to do things a little differently than you have in the past. One possibility the first year is to plan to spend the holidays in another setting.



7. ANTICIPATION CAN BE WORSE

Anticipation of a holiday or anniversary can be worse than the actual day itself. For those of you who are newly bereaved, it is important to know that grief will soften and, eventually, the holidays will not be so difficult.

Talk to your family and set realistic expectations. Share the obligations, the contributions...and the love.

8. Beware the ‘*shoulds*’...there is no need to feel obligated to follow a tradition.

• If holiday shopping seems too hard, think about having a friend or relative go shopping with you, or do the shopping for you.

• **Accept help, if it is helpful.** Let your friends know what you need.

• Go SHOPLESS this year or donate to charity. Many people don't need more

stuff and might welcome a donation to charity in their name.

• **Simplify.** Cut back on your holiday cards or choose not to send holiday cards. That is alright, too.

• Put up holiday decorations or not. If you do, let children, other family members or friends help you.

9. Do what is most helpful *for you.*

Self care. Give it time.

If ever there was a time to treat yourself like a cherished friend, this is it.

Grief may make it difficult for you to know where to start. Being confused is part of the process.

Be gentle with yourself and don't expect it to be business as usual. If you have a to-do list, consider throwing it away or at least lowering the bar. Give yourself some space to just sit and do nothing.

TREAT YOURSELF LIKE A CHERISHED FRIEND...

• Give yourself permission NOT to be your usual self. Take time "off." If you cry, let it be okay. Being where you are, being authentic in loss supports your healing and that of your family's.

Allow yourself to experience the sadness that comes. It may give others an opportunity to grieve and feel sad at this happy time.

Acknowledge that you are doing the best you can.

You may notice that you have been ignoring your own health or don't care very much about yourself, or you may believe that you don't deserve self care. Reconsider that with love.

If you have a physical problem brought on by stress, or an emotional reaction, pay attention to it. Here are some strategies that other bereaved people have found helpful:

- **Exercise,** stretch and breathe deeply. Set your cell phone to remind you to do this throughout the day.
- **Look for a balance** between time alone and time with others.
- **Spend time in nature.**
- **Be with a friend:** have lunch, watch a movie or walk together.
- **Take a soothing bath** or hot shower. Get a massage.
- **Walk in beauty.** Take a slow stroll or a brisk walk near water or in a forest. It helps.

SIMPLIFY HOLIDAYS:



ASK A FRIEND TO HELP.



DO GIFT CARDS...



FOOD BANKS NEED HELP AND DONATIONS



WALK IN NATURE...



10. “Someone is Missing.”

Remind yourself that within the darkness of this season, seeds of hope and renewal may be planted. In time, they will grow.

When we are grieving, it is normal to feel a deep absence but especially in autumn...and the holidays. You may find comfort from simple activities that remember and acknowledge the person who has died:

- Plant a tree in their memory
- Light a candle & create a memorial space
- Hold on to your faith, whatever it may be
- Donate to charity in their honor

A GOOD GRIEF GUIDE TO EASIER HOLIDAYS

Our Hospice thanks you for the honor of supporting your loved one in their last days.

Our staff Interfaith chaplains offer “Good Grief” bereavement support in groups & individually because *everyone* needs a little help from time to time (and lots of good rest...).

We wish you peace in the holiday season.

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