

HOW TO HELP OURSELVES THROUGH HOLIDAYS

In our lives, there are many holidays or special days, such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. These are all difficult days for the bereaved. These times, already stressful, may intensify feelings of pain and loneliness.

Here are some of the things that other bereaved persons have found helpful. Choose the ones that will help you.

Create new traditions.

You may want to spend holidays or special days in a new setting, take a trip, visit friends or volunteer in a new setting. Be careful of "should". Don't feel obligated to follow tradition, unless doing so would be a comfort to you.

Keep a low Profile

Don't wear yourself out by shopping and attending lots of social functions. Be selective. Saying, "No thanks!" is OK.

Acknowledge your loss

Talk with your family about the holiday ahead of time and be honest about your feelings. Don't expect too much of yourself or of the holiday.

Christmas Shopping

If Christmas Shopping seems to hard, shop by phone or catalog, or have a friend or relative go with you or do it for you. Accept help.

Send cards early

Receiving cards addressed to or mentioning the name of the one who died can be very distressing. Consider sending cards out very early informing others of the death, or enclose cards used at the funeral service. Writing cards can be therapeutic. It is also OK not to send any cards.

Learn to listen to your inner voice

It is one of the best friends you have. Intuition may lead you to the right person or activity for that specific moment and can spare you those which are unsatisfactory.

It is OK to be alone

Isolating yourself from others is not recommended, but there are times when solitude is deeply gratifying. Explore being alone and learn what is most healing to do during your alone time.

Share your concerns.

Share feelings, apprehension, etc., as the holiday or anniversary approaches, with a relative or friend. Tell them that this is a difficult time for you. Accept their help. You will appreciate their love and support at this time.

Holidays and anniversaries

Holidays and anniversaries often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of the loved one alive.

Running away

Running away from feelings requires enormous energy and does not help you heal. On anniversaries and holiday commemorate your loss. Ways other have found helpful include putting together a photo album from pictures you've been meaning to sort; visiting your loved one's grave; lighting a candle.

Remember, anticipation of any holiday or anniversary is often much worse than the actual day itself.

STRESS BREAKERS

Physical

- Exercise...try any form: walk, garden, dance, do yoga, swim, bike
- Take periodic breaks... a cat-nap
- Get a massage, facial, Reiki or Reflexology treatment
- Treat yourself to a new hairstyle
- Eat leisurely and healthfully...enjoy your food
- Stay safe physically...drive slowly, walk cautiously
- Breathe deeply and slowly

Emotional

- Adopt a wide expression of feelings...cry, laugh, groan, sigh, yawn
- Be proactive with feelings...write, talk to a trusted person, punch a bag, draw, paint
- Surround yourself with things that are alive...kids, plants, pets, friends
- Receive and give large doses of affection...touch, hugs
- Luxuriate in nature...flowers, walk in parks, sunrises
- Avoid troublesome people
- Give yourself a newsbreak...turn off TV, don't read the paper for a week

Mental

- Study something you've always wanted to learn
- Keep lists to help remember to-do's
- Choose to be with uplifting people
- Release feelings of guilt...forgive, forgive, forgive others and self
- Plan ahead to have time in between activities
- BE HERE NOW...focus on the present moment

Spiritual

- Simply be...spend time wasting time...daydream
- Feed your mind and heart self-affirming statements..."I know I can"
- Practice centering prayer
- Make peace with past hurts around the issue of God and Church
- Befriend death and embrace life
- Develop a heart of gratitude... Say "thank you"