



## **Grieving During the Holidays**

Approaching the holidays in the season of grief is particularly difficult and unsettling. Memories of years gone by, traditions and expectations all weigh heavily on our hearts and minds as we consider what we might celebrate this holiday season. Feelings of loneliness, depression, burden and resentment may become more pronounced as they stand in stark contrast to the pervasive tidings of joy, peace goodwill and loving. In our world as grievers, celebration may seem out of place.

And yet these holidays are difficult to ignore. Celebration is the normal pattern of life. We celebrate birthdays, weddings, national holidays, giving special consideration to times of significance. We celebrate to mark our lives, to differentiate, to honor. The holidays are thus difficult, because they are not “just another day” no matter how much we may now want them to be. They are special times, significant times, even if their significance has been forever changed.

## **Reflections**

1. What are you facing in your grief as you go through the Holidays? Has your grief changed as a result of facing/going through the Holidays?
2. Do you feel free to feel whatever you feel during the Holidays?
3. What are your expectations of yourself and others as you go through the Holidays?
4. Do you feel comfortable in telling others around you what you need? What do you need? What would help you the most?
5. What role does your family play in how you approach the Holidays?
6. What role does your faith play in how your approach the Holidays?
7. What holiday traditions might you keep, adapt, create or change as you observe the Holidays?
8. How might you connect to remember or honor your loved one in the midst of the Holidays?

# Helpful Tips

- Get plenty of rest.
- Set reasonable expectations for yourself. Don't try to do everything and see everyone.
- Be realistic about what can and cannot be done.
- Schedule brief breaks to be alone.
- Try to tell those around you what you really need, since they may not know how to help you. Ask for their understanding if you withdraw from an activity that doesn't feel like a good idea to you.
- Acknowledge you yourself that the occasion may be painful at times.
- Let yourself feel whatever you feel.
- Take time for yourself for relaxation and remembrance.
- Express feelings in a way that is not harmful.
- Don't be afraid to rethink traditions. Keep in mind that traditions, even long-standing ones, can be changed and can be resumed next year, or not.
- Limit your time – grief is emotionally and physically exhausting.
- Honor the memory of a loved one – give a gift or donation in his or her memory, light a candle, display pictures and/or share favorite stories with supportive people.
- Discuss, ahead of time with family and friends, what each person can do to make this time special. Share in the responsibility and see what can be eliminated or included to keep it less stressful.
- Remember, it is okay to laugh and enjoy yourself.
- Leave an event early if you want or need to.
- Make a shopping list ahead of time and shop on a good day.
- Propose a toast to your loved one and invite people to share memories.
- Give yourself permission to cut back on holiday decorations, preparations and gift giving.

## I Think I Can...During the Holidays

1. I Can recognize my present reality and my grief.
2. I Can – not escape this holiday.
3. I Can ask: what am I pretending not to remember about past holidays?
4. I Can consider altering rather than abandoning holiday traditions.
5. I Can take a “sabbatical” from providing others with a holiday.
6. I Can minimize seasonal preparations.
7. I Can simplify gift giving.
8. I Can negotiate with family & friends what we will/will not do during the holidays.
9. I Can do an act of charity in honor of my loved one.
10. I Can celebrate sensibly and sensitively.
11. I Can be alert to ways I distract myself or avoid the holiday.
12. I Can ignore criticism, pressure, advice or expectations from others as to my grief-style within the holiday.
13. I Can, in some way, do something special to remember my loved one during the season.

**Resource: Smith, Harold Ivan. “A Decembered Grief: Living with Loss When Others are Celebrating**