



The Dougy Center

For Grieving Children and Families

www.dougy.org

Help for the Holidays

Holidays can be hard times for grieving families. The season is filled with family get-togethers and festive events, many of which grievers are accustomed to sharing with the person who died. Surrounded by holiday "cheer," the pain of loss can seem overwhelming. Sometimes, a simple "Happy Holidays!" from a well-meaning friend can send you into a tailspin. It's hard to "put on a happy face" when you're grieving inside.

For the newly bereaved, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Years and other traditional holidays may be especially difficult. You might see the perfect gift for a loved one, and then realize he or she is not here to enjoy it. Whether your grief is new or old, there are ways you *can* make the holidays more bearable and less fatiguing for you and your children. You may also discover ways to honor the memory of the person who died and to begin new meaningful traditions in the family. Here are some suggestions. Take what is helpful for you.

- **Accept your Limitations.** Grief can be all-consuming, no matter what time of year it is. Holidays place additional stresses and demands on our lives. You may not be able to do all the things you've always done. Lower your expectations and allow yourself time and space to grieve.
- **Plan Ahead.** Decide ahead of time what you can and cannot do comfortably and let your friends and family know. For example, can you handle making the family dinner or should someone else do it? You may want to make a list of all the things you usually do - greeting cards, baking, shopping, decorations, parties, dinners etc. - and decide what you most want to do. Talk with your kids about plans and allow them to be involved in deciding how the family spends the holiday. They will appreciate being included.
- **Ask for Help if You Need it.** There's a good chance that friends and family are looking for ways they can be helpful to you during the hard times. You may want to continue certain traditions around the holidays, but feel you can't do it alone. Involve others. People enjoy supporting others in concrete ways, such as cleaning, cooking and baking. Sometimes it's hard to ask for help because we worry about burdening others. But more often than not, they are more than happy to contribute.
- **Allow for Rest.** The holidays can be physically and emotionally draining for us all. Grieving is tiring too. Naps, walks, quiet times and other forms of relaxation - even for a short stretch of time - can be revitalizing. Encourage children to have times of rest and quiet play as well.
- **Eliminate Unnecessary Stress.** Of course we can't entirely remove stress from the holidays. But we *can* set limits! For example, we all know how exhausting shopping can

be, especially as we get closer to the holidays. If you plan to buy gifts, consider shopping early or buying from catalogs.

- **Acknowledge the Life of the person Who Died.** There are many creative ways to honor a person's memory during the holidays. You may wish to do so by carrying on your family traditions or by creating new ones. Here are some ideas:
 - Buy or make a memorial candle to light during the evening throughout the holiday season
 - Observe a moment of silence or prayer before a holiday meal (or at another appropriate time) in honor of the person who died
 - Make a special toast or share memories of the person who died
 - Buy a gift in honor of your loved one
 - Make a donation to a charity in the name of your loved one or help a family in need by making a holiday meal for them or sending presents to their children.

Remember: There is no right or wrong way to "handle" a holiday. Some may wish to keep family traditions while others choose to change them. Everyone grieves differently. Honor yourself and your grieving. Have a peaceful holiday.