

Hospice and Palliative Services

Handling special occasions



Holidays and other special occasions are often difficult times for those who grieve. The realization that things will be different now that a loved one is gone evokes feelings of sadness and loneliness, and a sense that it isn't right to celebrate in their absence. Following are some suggestions to help you manage these times:

Mark on a calendar all special occasions that occur during the year. These might include traditional holidays, birthdays, anniversaries (including the one-year anniversary of the death), summer vacations and family reunion times.

Anticipate each occasion by creating a plan to help anchor yourself. Decide what you will do and with whom you will commemorate that day. Do what is meaningful for you rather than act out of obligation or habit.

Acknowledge the activities that cause you the most discomfort. Then make some changes accordingly. For example, you might decide to head out of town rather than stay home. Or perhaps you'll forego the sending of holiday cards.

Use simple rituals to remember your loved one. Burn a candle, go to the cemetery, place a rose on your table or make your loved one's favorite dessert.

Do something for others. Volunteer at the local food bank, donate to a meaningful charity or invite a guest, who would otherwise be alone, to share your holiday meal.

Keep a manageable pace. Be sure to rest or nap as needed to recharge. Also, ask others for assistance and divide up the workload. You don't have to do it alone.

Be accepting of whatever mood you are in. You don't have to act happy just because it's a holiday. On the contrary, if you feel like doing something enjoyable, by all means do it! Laughter is every bit as important as tears.

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Your holiday bill of rights



Holidays can be difficult after a loved one's death. However, anticipation of the celebrations is usually worse than the actual events. Know you have the right to choose if or how you want to participate in any of the festivities. There are no set rules!

- You have the right and are encouraged to anticipate and plan ahead.
- You have the right to make your own decisions.
- You have the right to do something totally different than in the past.
- You have the right to not celebrate if you feel it will be too painful.
- You have the right to go out of town or stay at home.
- You have the right to decide with whom you'd like to spend time.
- You have the right to be kind to yourself.
- You have the right to a roller coaster of emotions.
- You have the right to reminisce about the person who died.
- You have the right to create rituals that honor your loved one.
- You have the right to cry in public.
- You have the right to laugh and have fun without guilt.
- You have the right to do something for others, even in the midst of your pain.
- You have the right to change your mind at any time.