

Getting Through the Holidays and Other Significant, Special Times

*Every family is different and has its own traditions and culture.
Here are some ideas from others who have lost a loved one
to help you figure out what works best for you and your family.*

Decide what you can handle comfortably for holidays, birthdays, and the anniversary of the death and other times of significance.

Can I handle the responsibility of the family dinner, etc., or shall I ask someone else to do it? Shall I stay here, or go to a completely different environment? It's O.K. to say no. There is no right or wrong way in handling these times. Make some changes if they feel comfortable for you. Open presents a day early or perhaps in the evening instead. Have dinner at a different time or place. What works for you and your family is the "right" way. Let family and friends know once you've decided how to observe the time(s).

Examine your priorities: cards, baking, decorating, family dinner, etc.

Do I really enjoy doing this? Is this a task that can be shared?

Consider doing something special for someone else.

Give a gift in memory of your loved one. Donate money you would have spent on your loved one towards a gift to a charity. Adopt a needy family for the holidays. Invite a guest (foreign student, older adult) to share festivities.

Recognize your loved one's presence in the family.

Hang a stocking for your loved one, set a place at the table, or do something else in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings. Burn a special candle to quietly include your loved one.

Try to get enough rest. Holidays can be emotionally and physically draining.

Take a warm bath and/or drink warm milk before going to bed. Warmth is soothing. Take time to unwind. Do not go to bed after a flurry of activity, either mental or physical. Learn a relaxation technique such as meditation and practice it.

Allow yourself to express your feelings.

These events often magnify feelings of loss. It is natural to feel sadness. Share concerns, apprehensions, and feelings with a friend. The need for support is often greater during these times.

Keep in mind the experience of many bereaved persons is that they do come to enjoy holidays and other significant events again. There will be other celebrations.