

Coping With the Holidays

We know this is not an easy time of year, but remember, there is no right or wrong way to get through the holiday season. Everyone is different and has a different/unique way they express their grief as well as their joy. It's a good idea to get in touch with yourself to understand how you express what you are feeling

1. Most of all, give yourself permission to feel however you feel, acknowledge and accept your feelings and be gentle with yourself.

2. Set realistic expectations for yourself.

It's okay not to accept all invitations you get, it's ok to do things differently than you have in the past

3. Manage the anticipation.

Often times the anticipation is worse than the day itself.

4. Be proactive—plan ahead

5. Spend time with friends and family members who understand your situation.

6. Have an escape strategy.

You may want to take your own car so if you want to go home, you have the option to escape.

7. Inventory your holiday traditions.

Think about your family's holiday traditions and only focus on what's really necessary to you and your family.

8. Create new rituals and traditions

Celebrating holidays can be challenging for grieving families. It will never be the same without your child or sibling but you can make some changes to make this time meaningful. It is special and appropriate to create some kind of ritual that acknowledges the person's absence. New rituals at the holidays allow you an opportunity to cherish the memories while creating new ways to cope. These will be different for each family but you might consider adding candle lighting, changing traditional foods to your child or sibling's favorite food, sharing good memories around your holiday table.

9. It is ok to talk with others about your loved ones and your experience.

10. Allow yourself space to be sad but also to share happy memories

You may feel that others don't want to talk about your child or sibling. But they may be thinking the same thing about you. You can give your family permission to honor your child's memory.

11. Engage in self-care.

Do something for yourself that makes you feel good, exercise, get a massage, read a book, spend time with a friend, or whatever it is that helps you feel relaxed.

12. Evaluate your coping plans.

Do your plans isolate you from those who love and support you best?

Do your plans allow for meaningful expression and celebration of what the particular holiday means to you?

13. Don't be afraid to have fun.

Enjoyment and laughter are not expressions in which you abandon your child who died. Allow yourself and your family to enjoy the holiday without feeling guilty.

14. Attend a support group or workshop.

Talking to others who also experienced the death of a child can help you understand that you are not alone. Others can share helpful ways that they have survived the holidays.

15. Everyone grieves differently so everyone will cope differently. Think ahead about what might help you to get through what could be a difficult day