

Handling the Holidays



Those who have been through one or more holiday seasons following the death of our child offer these suggestions:

KNOW WHEN YOUR HOLIDAYS ARE:

Holidays are not just at Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas or New Year's. Holidays are those times when family and friends get together for fun. It may or may not be associated with the traditional days of celebration.

- Mark on your calendar the months during which your family's holidays occur.
- Begin early to plan your coping strategies.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HOW YOU PLAN YOUR HOLIDAY:

Together, as a family, examine the events and tasks of the celebration and ask the following questions:

- Do we really enjoy doing this? Is it done out of habit, free choice, or obligation?
- Is this a task that can be shared?
- Would the holiday be the same without it?

DECIDE WHAT YOU CAN HANDLE COMFORTABLY:

- Whether we are open to talk about our child.
- Whether we feel able to send holiday cards this year.
- Whether we can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc., or if we wish someone else would take over some of these traditions this year.
- Whether we choose to stay at home for the holidays or choose a different environment.
- Shopping is definitely easier if you make the entire list out ahead of time. Then when one of the "good days" come along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion. Shopping by phone or from catalogs also helps.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO MAKE CHANGES. IT CAN REALLY MAKE THINGS LESS PAINFUL:

- Let the children take over decorating the tree, or invite friends in to help.
- Open presents the night before the holiday instead of in the morning.
- Have dinner at a different time. Change the seating arrangement.

- Burn a special candle to quietly include your absent son or daughter.

OUR GREATEST COMFORT MAY COME IN DOING SOMETHING FOR OTHERS:

- Giving a gift in memory of our child to a meaningful charity.
- Adopting a needy family for the holidays.
- Inviting a guest (a foreign student, senior citizen, someone who would otherwise be alone) to share the festivities.

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?

LET YOUR PLANS AND LIMITS BE KNOWN:

- Write or phone family and friends to let them know of any intended changes.
- Share with friends and family how you plan to approach the holiday and how they can best help you.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO HAVE FUN:

- Enjoyment, laughter, and pleasure are not experiences in which you abandon your lost child. You have not forgotten him/her. Your child would not want you to be forever sad; you need not feel guilty over any enjoyment you may experience.
- Give your self and members of your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday.

Finally, as you seek to make sensible plans, remember to make them firm enough to support you but flexible enough to leave you some freedom. Most important, take time to love and let yourself be loved – for this is the real gift of the holiday season.

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