

HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Holidays can be hard times for grieving families. They are filled with family get-togethers and festive events which can be sad reminders of your child's loss and absence. Surrounded by holiday cheer, the pain of loss can seem overwhelming. Sometimes, a simple 'Happy New Year!' or 'Merry Christmas!' 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.

Whether your grief is new or old, there are ways you can make the holidays more bearable and less tiring for you and your children. You may also discover ways to honour the memory of your child and to begin new meaningful traditions in the family.

Here are some suggestions. Take what is helpful for you.

Some suggestions for the holidays

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 and let your friends and family know. 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

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.

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 catalogues or over the internet.

Acknowledge your child's life

There are many creative ways to honour your child'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 honour of your child.
- Make a special toast or share memories of your child.
- Buy a gift in honour of your child.
- Make a donation to a charity in the name of your child 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. Honour your child, yourself and your grieving and have a peaceful holiday.

Source: Adapted from The Dougy Center for Grieving Families and Children, www.dougy.org