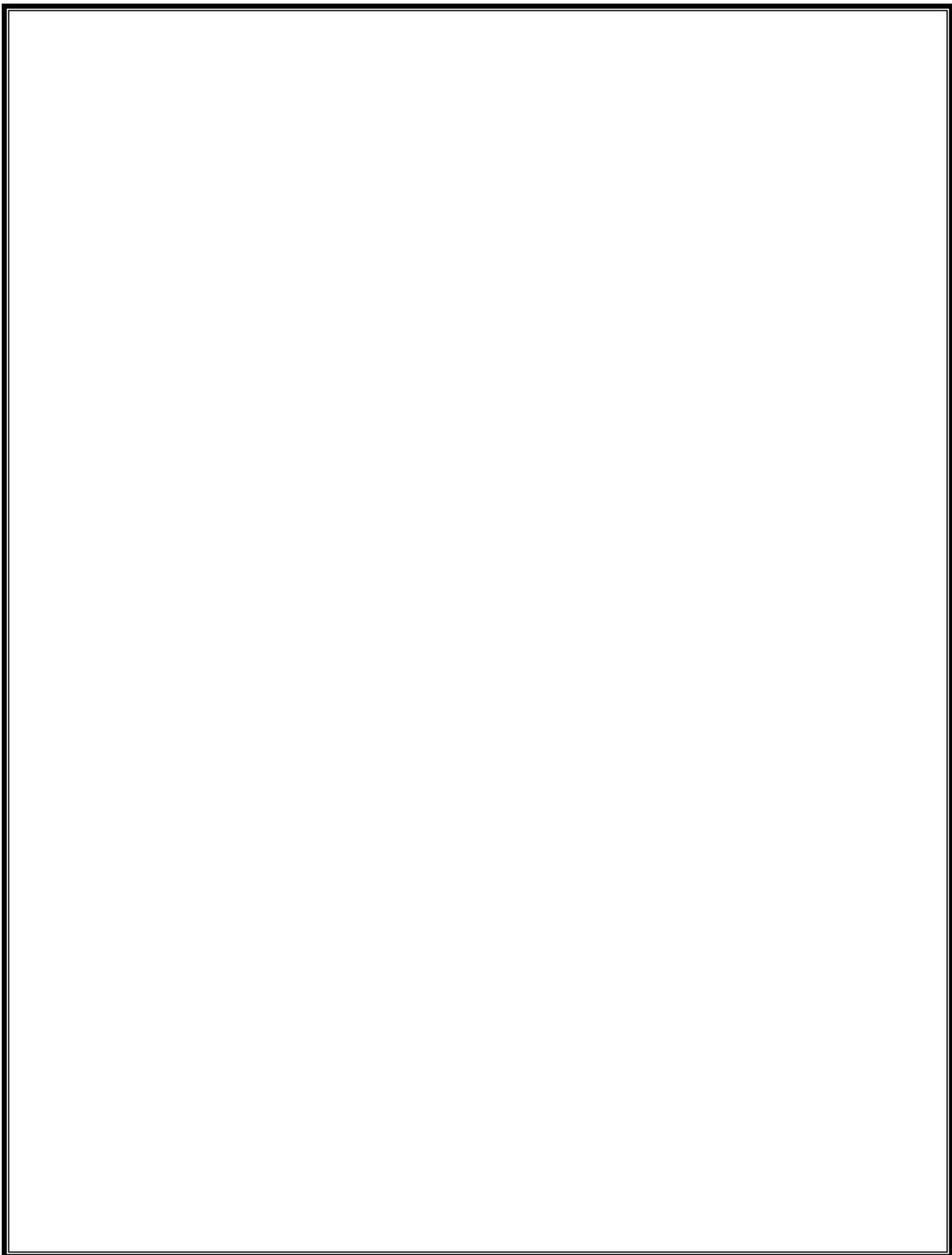


Hope For The Holidays

Grief Resources for The Holiday Season





Thoughts for the Holidays

by Joannetta Hendel, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Plan Ahead

Bereaved individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally, as well as your own preferences.

Accept Your Limitations

Grief consumes most of your available energy no matter what the season. The holidays place additional demands on your time and emotions. Plan to lower your expectations to accommodate current needs.

Make Changes

Your circumstances have changed. Expect to make necessary alterations in holiday plans to accommodate those changes. Consider changing your surroundings, rituals and/or traditions to diminish stress. Serve notice on family and friends that this year things may be somewhat different.

Trim Down to Essentials

Limit social and family commitments to suit your available energy. Shop early or use catalogue sales. Re-evaluate priorities and forego unnecessary activities and obligations.

Ask for and Accept Help

Accept offers for assistance with holiday shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, etc. Chances are loved ones are looking for ways to lessen your burden at this time of year. Allow those who care about you to offer their support in concrete ways.

Inform Others of Your Needs

Give family and friends the tools they need to help you through the holidays. Be specific with them about your preferences and desires, and keep them up-to-date when those needs change.

Build in Flexibility

Learn to 'play it by ear'. There is no concrete formula for learning to deal with loss. You are the foremost authority on what is best for you, and your needs may legitimately change from day to day.

Accept the fluctuations that must occur when walking in unknown territory, and learn to take each moment as it comes.

Give Yourself Permission 'To Be'

Allow breathing space and expect fluctuations in mood and perspective. The bereaved work overtime.

Not only is life more complicated, but all energy is siphoned into mental and emotional resolution. Grieving is nature's way of healing the mind and heart from the greatest injury of all. Allow yourself the privilege of limping till your wounds have healed and you can learn to run again.

THE GRIEVER'S HOLIDAY BILL OF RIGHTS

by Bruce H. Conley © 1992

You have a right to say "TIME OUT" anytime you need to do so.

Time out to let up, blow off some steam, step away from the holiday, huddle and start over.

You have a right to TELL IT LIKE IT IS!

When people ask, "How are you?" you have the right to tell them how you really feel, not just what they want to hear.

You have a right to DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY!

There is no law that says you must always do Christmas (or other holiday) the same way. You can do 10 cards instead of 100. Or you can do no cards at all. You can open presents at somebody else's house. You can do without a tree. You can have pizza instead of turkey. The list is endless.

You have a right to BE WHERE YOU WANT TO BE!

Be at home or with friends or relatives. Be in any city, any state you choose. There is no law that says you must stay at home.

You have a right to SOME FUN!

When you have a day that isn't so bad and you feel like doing something just for fun, do it. Don't be afraid of what someone else will say if they see you laughing and having a good time. Laughter is every bit as important as tears. As hard as it is to believe, you will laugh again.

You have a right to CHANGE DIRECTION IN MID-STREAM!

Holiday grief is unpredictable. You may be all ready to go somewhere or to do something and suddenly be overwhelmed. When that happens, it is OK to change your mind. There will be plenty of times in life to be predictable. Exercise your right to change your mind.

You have a right to DO THINGS AT DIFFERENT TIMES!

Go to church at a different time. Open presents at a different time. Serve your holiday meal at a different time. Go to bed and get up at a different time. Don't be a slave to the holiday clock. You may even choose to celebrate on a different day.

You have a right to REST, PEACE, and SOLITUDE!

You don't need to be busy all the time. Take a nap whenever you need one. Take time to pray and/or meditate, to recharge your spirit.

You have a right to DO IT ALL DIFFERENT AGAIN NEXT YEAR!

Just because you change things one year, doing something different does not mean you have written it in stone. Next year you may want to change it back or still do things another new way.

My Personal Holiday Plan

I predict the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The most difficult people to be with might be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

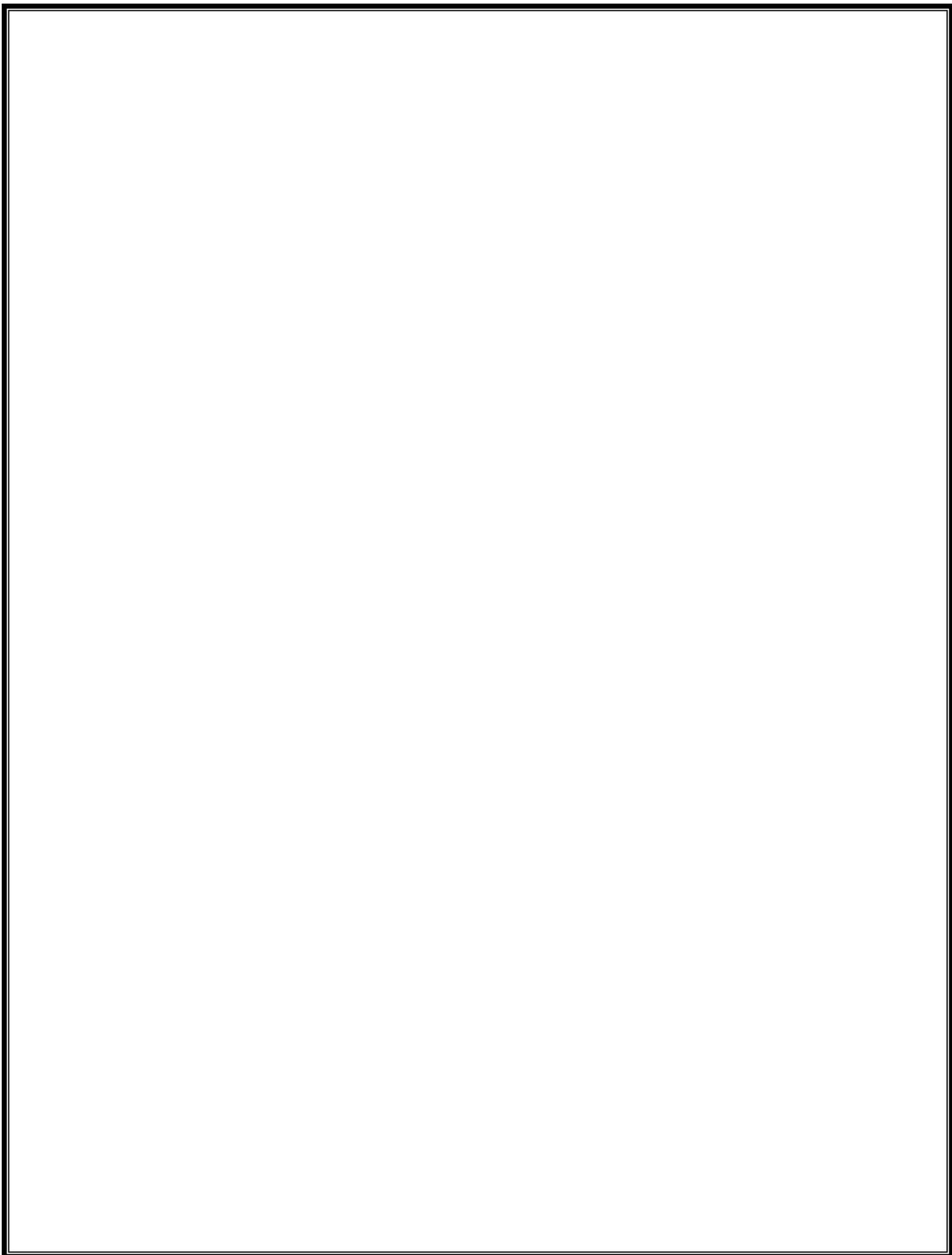
My grief triggers might be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Words that would be helpful for me to hear would be:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

This year, I want to include the following traditions in my holiday:



from **The Season of Light**

by: Darcie Sims, Ph.D. [From the Nov/Dec 1995 issue of Bereavement Magazine]

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to bear. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

BE REALISTIC

It will hurt, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!) Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.

BE KIND AND GENTLE TO YOURSELF

Figure out what you *should* do, balance it with what you are *capable* of doing and then *compromise*. Forgive yourself for living.

PLAN AHEAD

Grieving people often experience a tack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is *really* important to you.

LISTEN TO YOURSELF

As you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends.

ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF PHYSICALLY

Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli. If nothing else, jog your memory!

CHANGE SOMETHING

Everything has already changed, so don't be afraid to change some traditions. Try whatever pops into your head. You can always stop it if it doesn't feel quite right or doesn't work! But don't toss out everything this year. Keep some traditions. You choose which ones.

LEAVE THE WORD "OUGHT" OUT OF THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

HOLD ON TO YOUR WALLET AND CHARGE CARDS

You can't buy away grief, but you might be tempted to try.

UNDERSTANDING...

That heartache will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece. Don't deny yourself the gift of healing tears.

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SHARE YOUR HOLIDAYS

With someone, anyone! Ride the ferry, visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

WORK AT LIFTING DEPRESSION

Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. (Cookies are often therapeutic!)

HANG THE STOCKINGS

Place a wreath on the grave. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

LIGHT A SPECIAL CANDLE

Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared.

LEARN TO LOOK FOR JOY IN THE MOMENT

Get a pair of rose colored glasses and change the way you look at things. Joy happens when we look for it!

FIND THE GIFTS OF YOUR LOVED ONE'S LIFE

Think of all the "gifts" that your loved one gave to you - joy, safety, laughter, companionship, etc. list these "gifts" on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to you. Some may put them in a gift box while others may decide to place them in the stocking. Some may decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. But, wherever you place them, know these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that we still have those gifts, even if the giver has gone.

LIVE THROUGH THE HURT...

so that joy can return to warm your heart! This is the Season of Light - for it is the season when we remember that once we loved and were loved. And that is the greatest light and memory of all!

How To Help Ourselves Through the Holidays

by Donna Kalb

1. Family get togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about your feelings. Sit down with your family and decide what you want to do for the holiday season. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or the day. If you wish things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed. Undertake only what each family member is able to handle comfortably.
2. There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change them. It may help to do things just a little differently. What you choose to do the first year, you don't have to do the next.
3. Keep in mind the feelings of your children or family members. Try to make the holiday season as joyous as possible for them.
4. Be careful of "shoulds"--it is better to do what is most helpful for you and your family. If a situation looks especially difficult over the holidays, try not to get involved.
5. Set limitations. Realize that it isn't going to be easy. Do the things that are very special and/or important to you. Do the best that you can.
6. Once you have made the decision on how you and your family will handle the holidays, let relatives and friends know.
7. Baking and cleaning the house can get out of proportion. If these chores are enjoyable, go ahead, but not to the point that it is tiring. This year you could either buy baked goods or go without.
8. Emotionally, physically and psychologically, it is draining. You need every bit of strength. Try to get enough rest.
9. If you used to cut down your own tree, consider buying it already cut this year. Let your children, other family members, neighboring teens, friends, or people from your church help decorate the tree and house. If you choose not to have a tree, perhaps you could make a centerpiece from the lower branches of a tree, get a ceramic tree or a small table-top tree.
10. One possibility for the first year may be to visit relatives, friends, or even go away on a vacation. Planning, packing, etc., keeps your mind somewhat off the holiday and you share the time in a different and hopefully less painful setting.
11. How do you answer "Happy Holidays?" You may say, "I'll try" or "Best wishes to you." You think of many answers you don't say.
12. If you are accustomed to having dinner at your home, change and go to relatives; or change the time. Some find it helpful to be involved in the activity of preparing a large meal. Serving buffet style and/or eating in a different room may help.

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13. Try attending Christmas services at a different time and/or church.

14. Some people fear crying in public, especially at the church service. It is usually better not to push the tears down any time. You should be gentle with yourself and not expect so much of yourself. Worrying about crying is an additional burden. If you let go and cry, you probably will feel better. It should not ruin the day for the other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom.

15. Consider not sending or cutting back on your cards this year. It is not necessary to send cards, especially to those people you will see over the holidays.

16. Do something for someone else, such as volunteer work at a soup kitchen or visit the lonely and shut-ins. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family. Donate a gift or money in your loved one's name.

17. Share your concerns, feelings, apprehensions, etc., as the holiday approaches, with a relative or friend. Tell them that this is a difficult time for you. Accept their help. You will appreciate their love and support at this time.

18. Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved one alive.

19. Often after the first year, the people in your life may expect you to be "over it." We are never "over it," but the experience of many bereaved is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold on to Hope.

20. Don't Forget: "Anticipation of any holiday is usually much worse than the actual holiday."



Hanukkah Thoughts

by Stephanie Hesse The Compassionate Friends, Rockland Co., NY

At this season of lights,
We remember the light you brought into our lives:
The light of your laughter
The light of your wit and intelligence
The light of your love
May the time not be distant when the
memory of these lights
Will illuminate our hearts and minds
And eradicate the darkness therein.

Create Your Own Memorials

Following are a few suggestions for the Thanksgiving feast, Yuletide and the New Year. Remember that rituals are part of learning to cope. Most of these suggestions are adaptable for any of the holidays or throughout the entire season. Developing a new ritual takes planning, care and love. The thought you put into it will reap you many benefits in the days ahead.

1. Purchase or make a memorial candle. Your memorial candle may be lit each morning or evening and extinguished only before bedtime throughout the holiday season. There are also perpetual candles (liquid paraffin in a can placed in a glass container) which may burn for up to a week.

2. Toast your child. Create a special toast to your loved one, using your favorite wine or beverage. This can be done on any of the holidays when the family is gathered together or even when you are alone.

3. Your favorite story. Reserve some time at the table or around the Christmas tree to tell a favorite story about your loved one. This could accompany the special toast to your memories.

4. Place a single flower on the table. Choose your favorite flower in honor of the "presence" of your loved one.

5. Observe a moment of silence. Silence or prayer before the meal or at another time you deem appropriate is a simple and gracious way to honor your love.

6. Family album. Spend some time together as a family with the family album. Make it a special celebration when the past is discussed, reviewed and re-lived.

7. Buy or create your own Advent Calendar. You may want to place a photograph of members of the family or close friends behind each window from December 1 to 25. This tradition anticipates coping slowly, day by day as the season passes.

8. Buy a living Christmas tree. Most nurseries and Christmas tree vendors now sell live evergreens that are ready to be planted in the yard after the Holiday Season. Planting new life to commemorate the meaning of the life of your child can be shared with family and friends,

who may also be invited for refreshments or a meal after the planting ceremony.

9. Garnish your tree. This year you might decorate your tree with fresh flowers and products of nature, or an outside tree with berries, seeds and other kinds of food for the birds and squirrels.

10. Create luminaries. Line your sidewalk or driveway with luminaries. These are a Mexican tradition and are simple to make, yet lovely as they light up the night in a soft glow. All you need are brown paper sandwich bags, small candles and sand. They signify a warm welcome.

11. Buy a Christmas present for/from your loved one. A gift for the home which will have a special place or take on special meaning for holidays to come can be the gift to/from your loved one.

12. Make a donation/gift to charity. An established agency will welcome your gift in memory of your child. You might want to help a needy family by providing Christmas dinner for them or buying small gifts for the children.

13. Decorate the altar at church. Your decoration may be as simple as a flowering plant, or whatever seems appropriate as you share the memory of your loved one with your congregation.

14. Discuss the values you share as a family. Set aside a time before opening gifts to discuss the values you share as a family and how your loved one contributed to the quality of your life.

15. Drink a toast to the future. The New Year may bring with it your own resolution toward hope. Drinking a toast to the future does not neglect the past, but gives us the time to look ahead and regain some sense of control over our lives. For the newly bereaved, this opportunity is even greater. There is something about planning a new or renewed direction which is very encouraging.

Our wish for you in the days ahead is to remember that anguish is not forever, that joy is possible even in grief, that time is your friend, and yourself your best companion. Be "in accord" your yourself. **PEACE.**