

## GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

There are no magic answers that will make the holidays “okay” for you this year. It is likely to be difficult no matter how you prepare, but having some ideas and plans worked out ahead will give you some sense of control. Listed below are some ideas and suggestions gleaned from many sources that I, and others, have found helpful. Choose the ones what will be helpful for you.

Be honest with other family members concerning your feelings about the holidays. Ask them to share their feelings with you and maybe together you can work out a holiday plan that will please all of you.

Know that as a grieving parent you have physical and emotional limitations. Evaluate your priorities this year. Decide what you want to do and what you are capable of doing. Share and delegate the holiday tasks.

Do you stay home or do you “run away” this year to a different environment?

Who can handle the family dinner, or do you go out this year?

Will you send Christmas cards this year? (For those who don't know, tuck in your child's funeral service card.

What about gift giving this year?

This year do you really want to \_\_\_\_\_?(fill in your own task)

Don't be afraid to make changes or create new traditions.

Open gifts at a different time than usual.

Have dinner at a different time (a buffet instead of sit down)

Have a white tree instead of the usual green one. (Maybe no tree at all this year?)

Attend a different church. Attend a different service.

Light a special candle on the dining room table in honor of your child.

Have a special candle that anyone can light when they are thinking of him or her.

Instead of not hanging your child's stocking, hang a stocking for her and ten other people.

Put a special Christmas Tree on his/her grave. Go as a family and decorate it. (Tears are welcome here!)

Invite a guest for the day.

Make a donation to your favorite charity in your child's name.

Stay in bed and cry all day. (I doubt it will last all day.) Then surprise the rest of your family and show up at their house.

Be careful of “shoulds”. Do what is most helpful for you and your family. If a situation looks especially difficult over the holidays, don't get involved if possible.

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

Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of your child, but it's important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. Blocking such feelings is unhealthy.

Keep the positive memory of your child alive.

Be aware that your spouse and your surviving children, and other family members, are experiencing grief also, even though they may not show it or talk about it.

Forgive yourself ahead of time for the enjoyment you are sure to have at some time during the holidays. Most grievers feel guilty at this. Are you really betraying your child by enjoying some small moments?

Have someone you can count on to be available to you in case you “go to pieces” despite all the good plans.

Be prepared for the stinging pain in your heart when you hear Christmas songs. (No, she won't be home for Christmas.)

Don't pretend that everything is just like it was; that nothing really happened.

Don't pretend you don't hurt.

Don't make changes in everything.

Don't just not observe the holiday at all.

Don't get so busy that you will not have time to think about your child.

Do something for someone else. Focusing on others for part of the holidays will give you a respite from your pain and help another at the same time.

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 parents is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold on to HOPE.

Don't forget: anticipation of the holiday is always worse than the holiday itself.

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