

MANAGING STRESS & GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS



Acknowledge the loss(es) – to yourself and those close to you – that the holidays will be different and possibly difficult. It is normal for the holidays to trigger a lot of grief following a significant loss. Trying to pretend you are joyful when you are hurting only makes it worse.



Own your emotions. Too often we tend to hide the emotions we believe to be negative. Taking time to acknowledge what you are experiencing is important and allows you to grieve what has been lost or changed.



Release yourself from the pressure to make the holidays “perfect” and consider reducing or eliminating the elements that seem most stressful for you. That might mean forgoing decorations or Christmas cards. It could mean asking someone else to host Christmas dinner. Take care of yourself.



If you have young children, you still need to celebrate Christmas, but it can be different and plan to do a memorial project to help children acknowledge their feelings of grief.



Be strategic. Incorporate your lost loved one into the holiday in special ways. You can play their favorite Christmas music, make their favorite dish, buy a gift for or from them or even plan a memorial for them such as a visit to their grave or a special dinner in their honor. Plan in advance things like how will you handle the empty chair at the table where dad sat or who fills a key role like passing out presents.



Ask for help. Talk to someone about your grief. It can be a counselor, clergy or another person who is grieving. There are often grief support groups around the holidays held at churches, hospitals or hospice.



Implement a gratitude practice. Daily or at least weekly, list, speak or thank God and or others one thing for which you are grateful. It can be small things or large things, but practice focusing your mind on what you have that brings you joy. And it is OK to experience happiness and joy, just like it is OK to cry. Don't feel guilty for your feelings – whatever they are.



Be present. We are often so distracted by all the activities of the holidays that we sometimes fail to give the one gift that is probably the most important – to be fully present in the moment with those you love. Gifts don't have to be expensive, consider doing something together. That may be what people remember most.

