

## **Holidays and Grief**

Deviate from the norm. This is a time when tradition maybe too difficult to continue.

If you feel you must continue with tradition, do only a part of it. Choose which part you can do at a comfortable level.

Children will understand if you explain to them that this year we are doing something different because Grandpa died. Simply say, "We miss Grandpa so much that this year we want to do something different."

Help the children plan something special for Grandpa, like planting a special tree or lighting a candle.

Get the children's input of how they want to honor Grandpa. They may have something special they wish to do.

Ask children if they wish to draw and make an album of Grandpa and their memories of him.

This is a time of learning for children. Be real. Acknowledge their pain, but include them in some activity, such as delivering food to a family in need. Remember that you are setting an example for when they experience future losses as an adult.

Make a grave blanket from branches, twigs, flowers, etc.

Go on a trip and leave the area. However, remain as autonomous as you can so that you have options and can return when you want.

Buy a special card for your loved one and keep it. You can continue this for as long as you want. Keep them in a special box.

Dedicate a mass to your loved one or dedicate something special in your place of worship.

You may also volunteer at some special place for the holidays if you have the energy. Helping those less fortunate will help you feel less alone and you can dedicate it privately to your loved one.

Send flowers in honor of your loved one to a hospice. You can also make bud vase arrangements for each of the patients there.

If you want to stay alone, plan your time with some activity, such as renting movies, writing cards, planting a special flower, taking the dogs for a walk.

If you do go to a social event, take your own car. You may suddenly feel anxiety and want to leave. If you go with someone, have an understanding ahead of time that if the event becomes too much, you may want to leave early.

Do something special for an acquaintance whom maybe in need of help, such as a gift of money or buying something that they have needed. See it as a gift from your loved one or in their honor.

Most of the time it is not wise to get a new pet during the holidays.

Acknowledge in some special way that your loved one is no longer here. If you pretend the holiday is not happening, you are avoiding reality and you will feel the sadness the following day. You are simply delaying the inevitable.

Drive to a favorite place and reflect on your new life.

Buy yourself something that you have always wanted if personal finances permit.

Get a massage or something to pamper yourself. Loving yourself and being your own personal advocate at this time is very important.

Watch a special video of your loved one.

If you have family for the holidays, plan a time when each person shares a favorite or funny story of your loved one. Remembering and laughing is very healing.

Do not get the same tree out for Christmas. Buy a smaller one that acknowledges the holiday, but is already decorated.

Your life has changed. You have changed. Acknowledge these changes by doing something different.

Make a picture album of you and your loved one for the grandchildren.

Write a letter to your loved one for the holidays. Keep it in a special journal.

Paint a picture or make a card for your loved one. Keep it or take it to the grave.

Buy balloons and let each one be a special wish to your loved one as you release them. This is an excellent activity for children also.

If a friend has died, acknowledge the loss to their family. Buy flowers, send a card, and please use the name of the deceased. It is hurtful to the family when no one mentions their loved one by name.

Write a letter to your friend's family and recall a particular memory regarding their loved one.

Call the family for the holidays and keep the phone conversation short, but very personal. Listen to their pain. They need someone to HEAR them. Know that you cannot "fix the pain", but honor their pain by listening.

If a family member or friend cries with you, that means they feel safe with you and are honoring you with their tears. Just be there for this sharing of pain.

If someone at your work has died, bring a small tree and ask others to bring one decoration in honor of the one who has died. You may want to give it to the family or just keep it at work.

If writing is your forte, write an article about your pain.

You may want to visit the area where cremated remains were scattered.

Release doves. These can be rented and will return to their home.

If you are the facilitator for a support group, ask participants to bring a favorite dessert that their loved one liked.

As a facilitator of a support group, schedule a time when everyone can meet at a restaurant sometime during the holiday season.

You do not have to have permission from family members to change the holidays, but discuss it with them or simply state, "This is what I plan on doing." This is a time to honor your own needs.

Have photographs of the loved one reprinted and/or enlarged for others.

You may wish to visit the place where your loved one died. This is not morbid. Remember that it is also the last place where your loved one was alive. You may wish to leave some memento there for your loved one.

Do what honors your needs and is meaningful to you.

If possible, do not focus entirely on self. You are not alone. Millions of other people are experiencing their sorrow during the holidays. By realizing this, you will be less bitter during this time.

Avoid the malls. Too much stimuli can tire you emotionally as well as physically.

Give yourself permission to cry. Sit in back of the church/synagogue in case you want to leave early.

Above all, be gentle with yourself and others around you. Do not direct your anger regarding your loss at others. Remember that you are making a new memory in the present. What type of memory do you choose to honor?

Remember that grieving is a process, just as loving is a process. The pain you feel today is not where you will stay forever.

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