



How Do We Celebrate HOLIDAYS NOW?

Social isolation during this pandemic has led to a community grieving human connection. We're living in circumstances that are completely new for almost all of us. Our normal routines, traditions and expectations have gone by the wayside one by one.

And now, as the pandemic, and the social distancing that comes along with it, continue into April and beyond, more of our cultural customs and expectations will be disrupted. How will we observe Easter? How about Passover? Or Ramadan? How will we celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day?

And it's not just holidays. Many other special occasions which come this time of year will not be happening at all, or will at least look very different this year. Events like high school graduations. College graduations. Or kindergarten graduations. School concerts or plays. Proms or dinner dances. Sports banquets. And birthdays of course.

These are just some of the holidays and special occasions that will look very different this year.

This disruption is difficult for all of us. For those who have experienced the death of a loved one, however, holidays and special events are usually difficult times already.

The one who died is no longer with us during these occasions. Memories of past enjoyment and togetherness contrast sharply with the pain of the present.

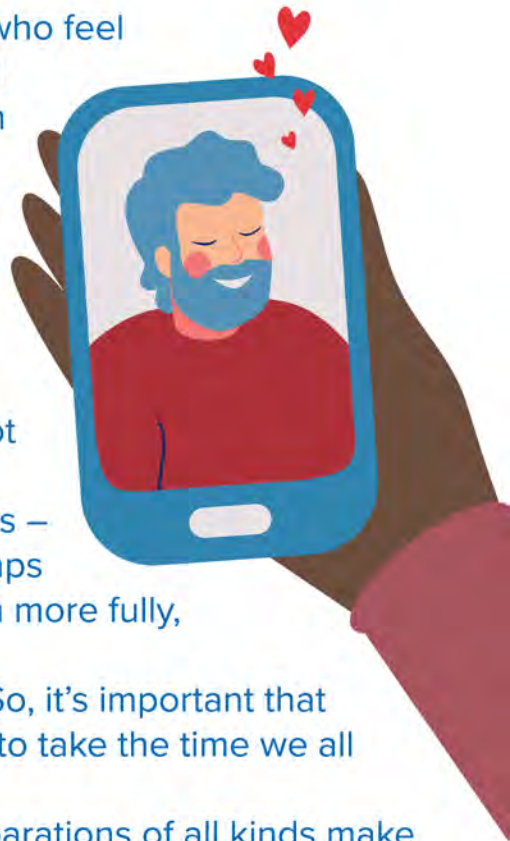
Now, with holidays and special events being doubly disrupted by grief – the grief of missing our person who died, in addition now to the grief of not being able to hold events, or not being able to be together with family and friends for traditional gatherings – this can be a very difficult time, where our feelings can be especially magnified.

In the midst of this disruption to normal life, here are some helpful reminders for you and your family:

- Physical distancing doesn't have to mean distancing socially. We can socially connect with friends and family through technology. Facetime, Facebook Messenger and other video services give us the ability to see each other without being physically together. Even an old-fashioned phone call provides connection.



- We can still find creative ways to honor the people in our lives who feel they are going to miss out on something. Seeking their input and guidance in this, we can work together in creating memories with them and for them.
- Of course, it's important to keep in mind that they may feel that alternative ways to mark these occasions will not be the same as, for example, their graduation or their performance would have been. It's important to acknowledge this loss, and the grief that comes with it. If tears come along with the realization that something that's been looked forward to, perhaps for years, is not going to happen, we can accept those tears and not try to talk people out of them. Crying, sadness, anger – grief in other words – is a perfectly appropriate reaction to losses like these. And perhaps there might be another time in the future to observe this occasion more fully, at least for some special events.
- Remember that grieving takes energy and that we have limits. So, it's important that we're gentle with ourselves and our children, allowing everyone to take the time we all need during this different kind of time.
- Don't get caught in unreasonable expectations. Losses and separations of all kinds make the holidays and special occasions difficult at the best of times. We can only do what circumstances and our own energy levels allow.
- It also helps if we take the time beforehand to plan out our activities. Having a plan can lower our stress. And so can the knowledge that we can also change our plan at any point if we need to.
- There can be grief on top of grief at this point in time. Grieving the loss of immediate holidays and events can trigger longer-term grief. We need to allow all members of the family, of whatever age space to grieve, and to grieve in their own way.



Getting through these times may be difficult. It is important to acknowledge our feelings and the reality of who or what we are grieving, rather than avoiding these feelings and thoughts. And remember, sometimes the anticipation of the day is more difficult than the day itself.



Finally, with all these stressors, and the feelings that come with them, we all need to remember to take care of ourselves. You can always contact us at the Highmark Caring Place if you need further support. And be sure to follow us on social media for other helpful resources.

