

Coping *with* grief *at the* holidays



HIGHMARK.
CARING PLACE



A Center for Grieving Children,
Adolescents and Their Families

*...how am I going to
make it through the holidays?
make it through*

*...I just want to fast forward
from November through the holidays
deep into January.
fast forward*

*...I can't believe it's even
worse the second time around.
second time*

*...These holidays really hurt...
really hurt*



*The holidays are different
– life is now different –
since your loved one died.*

*For those who have
experienced
the death of a family member,
the holiday season often seems to
intensify the already hard feelings
of sadness and pain.*

*Memories of past holidays
contrast sharply with the loss
of the present holiday.*

*And the bereaved person
can feel even more set apart,
different, at this time of year.
Children and adults feel all alone,
outside the circle of
fun, laughter and togetherness.*

*The following thoughts
have been gathered
as Caring Place families
have shared their experiences
of the holiday season.*

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Realize that the anticipation of the holidays

is often as difficult—or even more difficult—than the holidays themselves.

Remember your limits. Grieving takes energy.

You may find that you have even less energy now than at other times of the year. Be gentle with yourself and your children, and allow yourself to take whatever time for yourself you need.

Seek out supportive people. Find those people who accept your feelings, who understand that the holidays can be more difficult and who allow you to express your feelings. Ask for support.

Don't get caught in unreasonable expectations.

Losses and separations of all kinds make this a difficult season. For many of us, the holidays produce more stress and pain than joy. In light of this, there is no reason for guilt, no reason for wondering, “Am I ruining the holidays?” You don't need to provide the perfect holiday—for yourself, for your children, or for others.

Take time beforehand to plan out your

activities. Focus on your needs, and the needs of your children. Decide with your family what traditions you would like to continue, what traditions you would like to begin, and what traditions you're going to need to let go of this year. Having a plan—while knowing you can change it at any point—can help you from being caught off guard. In your grief you are in the process of changing traditions and rituals, and discovering new meaning for the holidays. Allow your children to be a part of this process.

Embrace your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after someone dies. Sharing and hearing your memories and your children's memories, crying and laughing together, keeps the person who died a part of these special days.

Talk about your grief, and about the person who has died. Share your feelings and your memories with people you trust. Say the person's name, and invite others to do the same.

Remember that everyone grieves differently— even within the same family. Allow everyone in the family to express their desires for the holidays. If some family members can't bear to even see holiday decorations, and other members would like to make things as much like the "Old Days" as possible, try to see how much each person's wishes can be accommodated. In many cases, the choices don't have to be all or nothing. Be respectful of each other's grief and hopes.

Allow children and adolescents space to grieve in their own way. Be prepared for any type of reaction from children. Be patient with anger or meanness, but also be careful of a child trying to "be strong" for you. They need to grieve as well. Give kids space when they need it, alone or with the support and security of friends.

Seek comfort in your faith. If your faith is important to you, being in the presence of a familiar, supportive community may nourish you.

Remember that your grief is important and unique. Be patient with yourself, love yourself, and don't let anyone take your grief away. And, know that there are times, despite your best efforts, that nothing will seem to work. So remember—be gentle with yourself, and with your children.

About the Highmark Caring Place...

The Highmark Caring Place is dedicated to children and their families who have experienced the death of a family member.

The Caring Place is a safe place with safe people where children and families can know that they are not alone in their grief, share their feelings and experiences in an atmosphere of acceptance, see that what they are going through is normal, and know that hope and healing are possible.



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www.highmarkcaringplace.com