



# How Do We Celebrate HOLIDAYS NOW?

Social isolation due to the coronavirus pandemic has led to a community that is grieving human connection. We are living through uncharted territory with brand new challenges. One by one, many of our normal routines, expectations, and traditions have gone by the wayside.

As we move toward a season of holidays that are observed by many cultures and faith traditions, and the pandemic and need for physical distancing continue, many of our rituals and expectations related to celebrating the holidays will be disrupted. And in addition to the winter holidays of Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, New Year's Eve and others, there are many other occasions throughout the calendar year that remind us, in ways large and small, of the special people from whom we may be separated by death, or simply by distance and circumstance. These might include birthdays, weddings, loss anniversaries, graduations, and other significant milestones.

Disruptions to our normal activities and ways of connecting are difficult for all of us. For those who have experienced the death of a loved one, however, holidays and special events during this time can be even more challenging. The one who died is no longer with us during these occasions. Memories of previous times of enjoyment and togetherness stand in sharp contrast to the pain of the present.

When the holidays and other special events are doubly disrupted — by the grief of missing our person and by the sadness of being unable to gather with family and friends for traditional holiday celebrations due to the pandemic — it can be an especially difficult time during which our feelings of loss are magnified.

In the midst of these ongoing disruptions to normal life, here are some helpful reminders for you and your family:

- Remember that physical distancing is not the same as social distancing. There are a multitude of ways to connect with family and friends through technology. Consider scheduling a video call on FaceTime or Facebook Messenger, a family dinner via Zoom, or a virtual family game night with Jackbox. Even making a simple phone call can be an important source of support and connection with loved ones.
- Work to find creative ways to honor and include the



important people in your life by seeking their input and guidance about what feels most comfortable to them. This can help make new memories with and for them, even if we can't be together in person.

- Allow yourself and your loved ones to acknowledge the feelings of sadness and disappointment that may come along with having to make changes to the way that holidays and special events have been observed in the past. These losses deserve to be grieved along with the other losses we may be facing.
- Find ways to include loved ones who have died in holiday celebrations — through sharing stories and memories, preparing their favorite meal, listening to music they loved, looking at photos, lighting a memory candle, or any creative ways you and your family can think of to remember and honor them.
- Recognize that grieving takes energy and that we each have limits. It's important to be gentle with ourselves and our children and loved ones, allowing everyone to take the time they need during this very unusual time in our lives.
- Try to avoid setting unrealistic expectations for yourself and your loved ones. Losses and separations of all kinds make holidays and special occasions difficult even during the best of times. We can only do what our circumstances and energy levels allow.
- Spend time planning activities beforehand, with input from family members. Having a plan can help to lower stress. However, it is equally important to allow yourself to change plans if you are not feeling up to carrying them out when the time arrives.
- Realize that there can be grief layered onto grief at this — or any — time of year. Special days happen throughout the year and are not confined to the holiday season, and these days can trigger a fresh wave of grief. It is helpful to allow all family members, whatever their age, the time and space to grieve in their own way.

Getting through these times may be difficult. It is important to acknowledge the reality of the people and things we are grieving and to allow ourselves the full range of feelings that go along with our grief. We may choose to identify supportive people and activities that can help us during challenging times.

Finally, with the stressors of all the feelings related to grief during a pandemic, it is particularly important to remember to care for ourselves. Please contact us at the Highmark Caring Place if you are in need of additional support. And be sure to visit our website and follow us on social media for other helpful resources and to learn more about our education and support programs and our special events.

