

The holidays are a time of giving thanks, joy and laughter, sparkle and glitter, sharing and gift giving. For people who are grieving, the holidays often bring a mixture of emotions and feelings, being overwhelmed by multiple demands and the difficulty of coping with the loss of loved ones.

The holidays are a tough time to grieve. Knowing that does not make them any easier, but it may help to understand and accept our reactions and find things to do to help ourselves. This is a time of year for reflection about the past year and hope for what the future can bring. During this time, it is important to look at who you are and your needs.

Grief is about loss and healing. The goal of grieving is to find the will to do what is best for you. It is important to communicate with others during this time of year, sharing your feelings, needs and limitations with others.

It may be important to develop a plan for dealing with the holidays. Having a “plan” can help you gain control. It is okay to change traditions or create new ones. There is comfort in doing things the same way, but it can also be very painful without your loved one. It is important to do only what feels right to you and your family.

Remember to ask for help when you need it. Accept offers of assistance from friends and family. They are searching for a way to make this time easier for you and allowing them to help is your gift in return. If you have children, remember their special needs during this time. Keeping a routine is important. Involve them in any changes and provide extra reassurance. They may express feelings and emotions through behavior, often times reverting to old behaviors. Offer them a chance to express themselves and to talk about their deceased loved one.

It is important to remember that the anticipation of any holiday can be much worse than the actual event. If by chance you find yourself enjoying the holidays, do not feel guilty. Having a good time does not mean you have forgotten your loved. You cannot change the past, but you can take care of the present to help you heal for the future.

Thoughts for the Holidays

Plan ahead

Bereaved individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they may encounter. Consider what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally, as well as your own preferences.

Accept your limitations

Grief consumes most of your available energy no matter what the season. The holidays place additional demands on your time and emotions. Plan to lower your expectations to accommodate current needs.

Make changes

Your circumstances have changed. Expect to make necessary alterations in holiday plans to accommodate those changes. Consider changing your surroundings, rituals and/or traditions to diminish stress. Serve notice to family and friends that this year things may be different.



Trim down to essentials

Limit social and family commitments to suit your available energy. Shop early or use catalog sales. Re-evaluate priorities and forego unnecessary activities and obligations.

Ask for help and accept help

Accept offers for assistance with holiday shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, etc. Chances are loved ones are looking for ways to lessen your burden. Allow those who care about you to offer their support in concrete ways.

Inform others of your needs

Give family and friends the tools they need to help you through the holidays. Be specific with them about your preferences and desires and keep them up-to-date when those needs change.


Build in flexibility

Learn to “play it by ear.” There is no concrete formula for learning to deal with loss. You are the foremost authority on what is best for you, and your needs may legitimately change from day to day. Accept the fluctuations that may occur when walking in unknown territory, and learn to take each moment as it comes.

Give yourself permission to “be”

Allow breathing space and expect fluctuations in mood and perspective. The bereaved work overtime. Not only is life more complicated, but all energy is siphoned into mental and emotional resolution. Grieving is nature’s way of healing the mind and heart from the greatest injury of all. Allow yourself the privilege of limping until your wounds heal and you can learn to run again.

During this holiday season, it is important to be aware of the changes you might be experiencing. Being open and honest about changes and feelings is important. Ask questions that need more than yes or no answers. Being aware of the issues will make a difficult time easier.

 *Hospice of the Red River Valley has many resources available for the public on a loan basis through the resource libraries in each of our offices. Topics include caregiving, terminal illness, dying, death, grief and loss. For more information about grief and loss, visit our website: www.hrrv.org or call us at (800) 237-4629.*