



SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH HOLIDAYS. BIRTHDAYS. ANNIVERSARIES OR OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Most people look forward to holidays and other special occasions but for those who have experienced a death of a loved one; holidays, birthdays and anniversary dates can be difficult times. Special occasions such as these are reminders of those you have loved and of happy times. You might feel uncomfortable, sad, angry or lonely as these important days come around. It is important that you deal with your feelings and emotions during this time. With careful planning, it might be possible to celebrate these events instead of fearing them. For the first year after the death of your loved one, each special occasion will be a reminder of the fact that this is the first time you are observing that day without your loved one.

If may be necessary to start a new ritual or tradition. If holidays, birthdays or other events were always celebrated in the home where the loved one lived, consider moving it to another person's home. If the person who died always planned the event, someone else will need to take the responsibility. But remember, there is nothing wrong with "breaking from traditions" and forming new traditions. Your memories of the person who died will always be a part of your life and it is not the tradition that is important. It may be gathering as family or friends in order to celebrate the occasion that is important.

For many people, it is comforting to be around family and friends on special days or for special celebrations. Plan ahead and talk with those with whom you feel most comfortable, in order to talk about the holiday, birthday or other special celebration and to make plans accordingly. **Anticipation is often worse than facing the event.**

The following are suggestions that have been helpful for others who have experienced the death of a loved one:

- Realize that this is a new holiday and it will not be like any other holiday of the past
- Recognize that this might be a difficult day or season for you.
- Don't be afraid to notice that your loved one is not present. Have dinner or a toast in his/her honor. Tell your favorite story about your loved one. Visit the cemetery or memorial site. It is OK to cry—and to smile; both are ways to heal your grief.
- Pray or take part in a spiritual activity that is helpful to you.
- Do what is comfortable for you, **not** what others think you should do or what you think your loved one "would have wanted you to do."
- Make plans yourself and do not wait for others to make plans.
- Be gentle with yourself. It takes time for the grieving process. Realize that you will have sad times.
- Take care of yourself. These can be stressful times and you might need more rest or physical exercise to help you deal with the stress. Practice relaxation techniques and be aware of your eating habits.
- Your feelings of loneliness and isolation might intensify during these special times when families and friends gather. Reach out and do not feel like you "are a burden." Ask for help. Others want to help and will be glad to help if they know you need extra support or assistance.
- Recognize your limitations. Feel free to decline invitations or to avoid celebrations that you know will be too painful for you this year but let them know that you would like to be "invited next year."

Holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, graduations, family reunions or whatever special occasion is being celebrated, are times of joy and no matter how sad, lonely or hurt you might feel, these are times to celebrate life and to find hope. Your loved one is still a part of your life and you cannot lose that love. Try to find strength during these times of gathering and remember the good times you have shared with your loved one.