

## Taking Care of Yourself Over Holidays After a Loss

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In our lives there are many holidays or "special days", such as wedding, birthdays, Easter, graduations and anniversaries to name a few. These are all difficult days for the bereaved, but for many, the most difficult holiday of the year is Christmas. This day more than any other has a "family together" meaning. During this time those grieving are acutely aware of the missing person or void in our life. For many, the wish is to go from December 24th directly to December 26th. We continually hear Christmas Carols and people wishing everyone Merry Christmas. We see the perfect gift for our dead child, spouse, or relative, and suddenly realize they will not be here. Listed below are some ideas and suggestions that others have found helpful in coping with the holiday season.

Choose the ideas that appeal to you:

1. Sit down with your family and decide what you want to do for the holiday season and what each family member can handle comfortably.
2. There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change and do things differently.
3. Once you have made the decision on the role you and your family will play during the holidays, let relatives know. They won't know unless you tell them.
4. Don't take on too many responsibilities. Find your way a little at a time.
5. Do something for someone else, such as volunteer work delivering meals, visiting the lonely and shut-in. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family.
6. Don't set your expectations too high. If you wish things to be the same you are going to be disappointed.
7. Realize that it isn't going to be easy. Just do the best you can.
8. If you feel like crying go ahead. It will not ruin the day for other family members, but will provide them the same freedom.
9. Set limitations. Do the things that are very special and important to you.
10. Holidays can be draining - emotionally, physically and psychologically. You need every bit of strength. Try to get enough rest.
11. Donate a gift or money in your child or spouse's name.

12. Baking and cleaning house can get out of proportion. If these chores are enjoyable, go ahead, but not to the point that it is tiring.
13. Let your children or other family members and friends help with the decorating of the tree and house. If you choose not to have a tree this year, perhaps you could make a centerpiece from the lower branches of a tree or get a table top tree.
14. If shopping seems to be too much, have your spouse, relatives, or a close friend help you. You may also want to consider doing your shopping through a catalog.
15. If you are accustomed to having Christmas dinner at your house, change and to a relative's home, or change the time. Some find it helpful to be involved in the activity of preparing a large meal.
16. Try attending Christmas services at a different time, or even a different church.
17. What you choose to do the first year, you don't necessarily have to do the next.
18. Cut back on your card sending. It is not necessary to send cards to those you will see over the holidays.
19. Keep in mind the feelings of your children or other family members, and try to make the holiday season as joyous as possible for them.
20. Accept the help of other people in your life. They want to help and can help only if you let them.
21. Don't forget: Anticipation of any holiday is so much worse than the actual holiday.

List of ideas taken in part from Family Life Education, 1342 Lancaster Ave., Syracuse, N.Y. 13210

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