

GRIEF SERIES: I can't imagine the holidays now that my loved one is gone

Grief is a difficult process to go through and no matter where we are in our grief process it seems to be amplified during the holiday season. We can often feel our loss more intensely and the feelings of loneliness and emptiness are ever more present. During the holidays there is a constant reminder from society and those around us that the holidays are all about togetherness, spending time with family and friends. It seems to those who are grieving that the spotlight is shining down on that empty seat next to them, just shouting to the world that our loved one is not here to experience this joyous season.

So how do we maneuver through the holidays while we are grieving? The most important thing to remember is that there is no absolute right or wrong way to do this. Remember that everybody grieves differently and you need to be able to do that at your own pace. That being said, there will be those around you who think they know what is best for you and will tell you just what you need to do. This is where communication is so important. Take the time to discuss your concerns about the holidays with your family and friends. Let them know what your wishes and expectations are and allow them to share theirs with you. Here are some ideas:

Decide what traditions you would like to continue to carry on and which ones you would like to change or let go. Let others know about changes so they are prepared as well. For instance, if Grandpa always carved the turkey, decide who will do that job before it is time for that to happen. Or maybe Dad was the one who always said the prayers. Who will now take that on?

Do you need to do everything? When you are in the throes of grief, do you need to send greeting cards, bake dozens of cookies, decorate the whole house, put up Christmas lights, prepare a large family dinner? For some, it helps to do all those things, to feel like the routine can stay the same. For others, it is too overwhelming and simplifying things would be more manageable. The point is, you have the right to decide for yourself what is enough or too much for you to handle at this time.

Talk about the person who has passed. Acknowledge it is difficult without her there. When others realize you are comfortable talking about her, they will be too. Share memories about past holidays or stories of her. Most find it best to not try to ignore that the person is missing.

Consider doing something in honor of your loved one. If your grandma loved reading to little children, collect donations for books to give to a local day care. Or maybe your loved one enjoyed animals and you would like to gather donated blankets to bring to the animal shelter. Think of something he enjoyed and turn that into doing something in his honor.

Focus on taking care of yourself. It can be emotionally and physically exhausting. It is important for you to get enough sleep/rest, eat healthy, and drink plenty of water.

If shopping amongst a lot of people feels like too much to ask of yourself, enlist a family member or friend to be your helper. Or shop online rather than going out to the stores.

Accept help from others. Assign tasks to others to complete for you. Most of your family and friends would love to be able to assist you – you just need to ask.

It is okay to feel the happiness and joy of the season. It is okay to laugh and live in this moment with your family and friends.

Losing someone close can be difficult to handle alone. Do you need help? Call **(800) 801-4182** or **(402) 354-8000** to schedule a confidential appointment. You can also access our website at www.BestCareEAP.org.