



Supporting Kidds
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Coping with the Holidays after a Loss

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As Halloween and the fall festivities unfold, we begin to shift our focus to the changing of the seasons and the wave of holidays that are approaching. For many families, this is a time of high excitement, anticipation, and joy. But for those who are grieving, the holiday season can serve as a challenging and painful reminder of family loss. The impending holiday season forces many bereaved families to grapple with multiple tasks of grieving, as they attempt to make sense of the ongoing changes in their family life and to find new ways to cope.

Holidays serve as yet another reminder of the permanent loss that comes with death. These times of celebration suddenly become markers of the passage of time since the loss: "This will be the first Thanksgiving without Dad..." "We've had 3 Thanksgivings since our daughter died..." With each approaching milestone, bereaved individuals acknowledge the permanency of death. These recurring reminders bring forth surges of emotions about the loss. These emotions shift in form and intensity, as we reexamine our relationship with the person who died in an effort to understand the roles he/she played in our life.

Holidays are often times of ritual celebrations. These celebrations are inevitably impacted by the death of a family member. Following a loss, grieving families face the challenge of finding ways to maintain their emotional connection with the person who died, while allowing the family to continue living and moving forward. While many families are often very overwhelmed at the thought of celebrating following the death of a family member, with time and consideration, most families find that the holidays become a special time to honor this family member. Holiday celebrations provide opportunity to maintain certain family traditions, instilling the message that while some things will inevitably change due to the loss, other rituals remain the same. Furthermore, the holidays can set the stage for creating new traditions to help propel a family forward in their journey through grief.

As the holidays approach, consider ways that you and your family can honor your special family member who died. Perhaps you can recreate the person's favorite meal or travel to his/her favorite places. Invite your family members to share favorite memories of this person. Share thoughts, memories, and wishes by writing a letter to the person. Offer a toast at a family

gathering in honor of your loved one. There are countless ways to honor your special family member while continuing to maintain certain family traditions.

Remember that the holidays can bring forth challenging emotions for all family members. Check in with your children to inquire about their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the upcoming holidays. Grant your children permission to have their own reactions and opinions about how to handle the impending holiday season. When possible, invite your children to offer suggestions and input about plans for the season. This will help children to gain back a sense of age-appropriate power and control at a time when so many things can feel unpredictable and unsure.

We invite you to join us on Wednesday, November 20th, for our special one-night support group, Coping with the Holidays. This annual event serves as an opportunity for families to gather to share ideas and support as we prepare for the upcoming holiday season. Children, ages 5-18, will meet in small groups with same-aged peers, while adults will work together. Please email support@supportingkidds.org or call 302-235-5544 to RSVP for this special event.

Finally, visit <http://grief.com/helpful-tips/coping-with-holidays/> or <http://www.griefshare.org/holidays> for more information about coping with the holidays after loss. On behalf of Supporting Kidds, we wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season.