

## *HOLIDAY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BEREAVED*

Holidays can be especially difficult after losing a child. Here are some suggestions from other bereaved people which may be helpful:

- First of all, recognize the fact that as a grieving person you have definite limitations and are unable to function as you normally would. It's important that you re-evaluate priorities and decide which activities you really feel up to participating in.
- Keep things as simple as possible!
- Ask yourself:

Just what can I handle comfortably?

Is this activity something I really enjoy doing? Do other family members find this activity needful?

Do I feel up to the responsibility of family dinner and/or holiday events or should I have someone else handle these things this year?

Have I considered or involved my spouse's/children's wishes in my plans?

Am I being realistic? Limit activities to the ones which are the most meaningful and enjoyable for your family.

Can this job be done by someone else or can someone help me do it?

Would Christmas be Christmas without this activity (baking cookies, decorating, attending certain events, sending cards)?

How many stockings do we hang? Put them all up or none at all? Some grief counselors suggest writing thoughts or feelings about your Loved One and putting them in their stocking. This may help younger children have opportunity to express their feelings.

- Try to correlate your tasks with your energy level.
- You may find making changes makes things less painful, like eating dinner at a different time or location, opening gifts at a different time, letting others do the activities you normally have done but feel unequal to this year, or maybe even going away for the holidays.
- Plan to be with understanding relatives or friends if at all possible.
- Realize you will have to educate others as to your need for hearing your loved one's name mentioned. They think they are doing you a favor avoiding it.

- Doing something for others may bring special comfort. Choosing a name from a Christmas tree for underprivileged people and providing a gift to make their holiday special, giving a donation in memory of your Loved One, or adopting a needy family for the holidays may be very healing for you.
- Do worst Jobs first.
- Allow for private time for yourself and others during the holidays. Knowing that you've planned an hour of quiet for this afternoon or some other set time may alleviate some of the stress that may amplify your loss when frustrations arise.

### SHOPPING

- Daily lists made out the night before or in the morning may prove very helpful. Lack of concentration is part of grief; lists help us remember things.
- Shopping will be easier if you make a list ahead of time. When one of your Better Days comes, you can get more accomplished by following your list— this reduces confusion, frustration, and time loss.
- Try to shop on less busy days, as early in the day as possible. Maybe ask a friend or someone helpful to go with you as decisions can be difficult when grief is fresh.
- Allow time (an extra hour a day) for the unexpected! Traffic will be heavier, checkout lines slower and longer, tape and paper supplies run out, or someone drops by, the phone rings or you run out of stamps and misplace your keys when you least appreciate such inconveniences.

### CHRISTMAS CARDS

Simply ignore the cards you'll get wishing you "the merriest Christmas ever." Various kinds of people send these:

- 1) People who wish with all their hearts they could take away your pain and indeed give you the happiest Christmas if they had the power to do so.
- 2) Thoughtless people who don't realize holidays amplify your loss, or maybe the sender bought the same card for everyone and that's its message.

Signing the cards without your precious loved one's name is too hard to do, maybe have the names printed in the cards or have another family member help sign them.

If a little letter seems appropriate, make photocopies of one so you aren't exhausted writing in all the cards.

For those who may not yet know of your loss, including a funeral card or copy of the funeral notice from the newspaper would be a way of telling them without causing you exhaustion from writing it all out for each one.

- Accept your feelings. Think about why you are feeling the way you are: “I feel sad because——” “I feel lonely today because—.” These sad times are to be expected. Accepting them and taking a few moments to ponder feelings may alleviate some awkward moments in public when frustrations complicate your sadness.
- Avoid eating too many sweets during the holidays as many people find sweets tend to make them more easily depressed.

#### SUGGESTED READING

How to Say Goodbye by Joanne Smith and Judy Biggs (Aglow Publications) has several pages of tips for coping with special days after loss.

*A RAY OF HOPE - Facing the Holidays Following a Loss* by Paul Alexander. This is a video available from The Centering Corp. (call 402-553-1200 to request a catalog) that has some great suggestions for coping during all of the holidays (not just Christmas) presented in a powerful way

May you find your own peaceful solutions to fit your own individual needs for coping with special days which are painful after losing Loved Ones.

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