

## Handling Special Occasions

Holidays and other special occasions are often difficult times for those who grieve. The realization that things will be different now that a loved one is gone evokes feelings of sadness and loneliness, and a sense that it isn't right to celebrate in their absence. Following are some suggestions for helping you cope with these times:

**Mark on a calendar all special occasions that occur during the year.**

These may include traditional holidays as well as birthdays, anniversaries (including the one year anniversary of your loved one's death), summer vacations, family reunion times, and so on.

**Anticipate each occasion by creating a plan to help anchor yourself.**

Decide what you will do and with whom you will celebrate or commemorate that day. Attempt to do what is meaningful for you rather than acting out of habit or obligation. Even staying home and doing nothing is okay, as long as you plan it ahead.

**Acknowledge the activities that cause you the most discomfort.**

Make some changes accordingly, at least for this year. For example, you might decide to "run away" to a completely different setting for the holidays rather than stay at home. Or you might decide not to send Christmas cards this year.

**Use simple ritual to remember your loved ones.**

Being alone can help renew our strength but being with the right friends/family can be a very supportive experience for you too. Try to attend holiday events and enjoy them if you can. Having a good time is not a betrayal of your loved one, nor is it a denial of your grief and loss.

**Do something for others.**

Some examples include volunteering at the local food bank, donating to a meaningful charity, or inviting a guest, who would otherwise be alone, to share in your holiday meal.

**Keep a manageable pace.**

And be sure to rest or nap as needed to recharge. Also, ask others for assistance and divide up the workload. You don't have to do it alone.

**Be accepting of whatever mood you are in.**

You don't have to feel or act happy just because it's a holiday. On the contrary, if you're having a day that isn't so bad and you feel like doing something fun, by all means do it! Don't be afraid of what someone else will think. Laughter is every bit as important as tears.