

## *The Holidays ... A Time for Reflection*



Holidays and special days that hold significance to each of us occur throughout the year. These times may be difficult for people who have experienced the death of a loved one. Emotions are heightened and the usual day-to-day activities can seem overwhelming. It is important to realize that each person's experience is different and that predicting feelings may be difficult. There are no right or wrong ways to cope with the additional anxiety this time of the year brings. Try to discover what works best for you, and "grow" from there. The following suggestions may help reduce some holiday stress and increase your ability to cope during this joyful yet painful time of year.

### **Plan Ahead**

Recognize that during grief you may feel that many things are out of control. It is important to plan for the holidays. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you socially and emotionally. Set both short-term and long-term priorities, and break them up into workable chunks. Try to anticipate and recognize possible sources of discomfort and decide what can or cannot be faced, altered or eliminated. Get family input about what activities would be most comfortable and meaningful.

### **Express Your Feelings**

Acknowledge that holidays may be difficult and do not be afraid to express your grief. Feelings will not disappear by ignoring them. Talking to caring family and friends will often make you feel better and allow those closest to you an opportunity to express their grief as well.

### **Lower Your Expectations**

Holidays require additional energy. Feelings of loss often leave you fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you and do not over-commit yourself during this busy time of year. Pull back and leave special time for yourself.

### **Ask For Help**

Inform others of your needs, and accept assistance with holiday activities. Loved ones are most likely looking for ways to lessen your burden. Let those who care support you in concrete ways. You may also want to seek help from an established grief support group.

### **Consider New Traditions**

Your life has changed significantly. Building new traditions can be a slow process. Let family and friends know that this year things may be different. If you wish to go away for the holidays, do so. Change things if you want to, knowing that the option to return to the old traditions will be there next year.

### **Embrace Your Faith**

During the holidays, you may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Express and be comforted by your faith. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to question or talk about these beliefs.

### **Do Something for Others**

Be aware that the greatest happiness may come in doing something wonderful for someone else. It can give the holidays special meaning.

### **Share Memories**

Do not be afraid to talk and share memories about the person who died. Though the process can be painful and sad, it may also lead to wonderful memories and laughter.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

Be tolerant of and accept your limitations as you continue to heal in your personal grief process. Do not place too many demands on yourself and family or force yourself to do things you do not want to do. Give special consideration to activities that will help both you and your family and forego unnecessary obligations. Do things that are self-supporting, and keep plans flexible. Allow breathing space and expect fluctuations in mood and perspective. You must be your own guide and do what makes you feel better.

If you would like more information or some extra support during the holiday season, call Hospice of the Carolina Foothills offices at (828) 894-7000 in North Carolina, (864) 457-9122 in South Carolina, or toll-free at (800) 617-7132.