

# Newsletter

## *Navigating Children's Grief*

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### **COPING DURING THE HOLIDAYS**

The holiday season can be especially difficult when you have lost a special someone. Memories of happy times and happy moments are bittersweet because the absence of a loved one is underscored during these special family times. Long-held traditions can bring comfort or sadness.

When you and your family are facing the holidays after the loss of someone close, some of the following ideas may be useful to you.

#### ***Planning***

Talk about how you are feeling about the holidays.

Check in with each other for ideas about what each family member would like to do.

Be open to making new or slightly different traditions.

Have a plan for your holiday time.

Share the planning with other family members.

#### ***Self-care***

Grieving is hard work. It is okay to set limits on your participation in holiday celebrations.

Give yourself permission to rest.

Give yourself permission to have fun.

Exercise and other activity can be helpful. Get outside with the children and do something physical.

Give yourself and your children permission to be upset. A powerful and fun activity can be for each family member to take a roll of toilet paper or paper towels outside, rip pieces off, dip in water to make a ball, then throw it against your wall or fence, shouting a feeling as you do so!

Let your friends know what you need, including help with the children.

### ***Other Coping Strategies:***

Do something for others: give a gift in honor of someone you care about; adopt a needy family for the holidays; invite a guest who would otherwise be alone.

Create a "symbolic presence" of the loved one you are missing...perhaps a bouquet of flowers, a candle, or a special handmade decoration.

Journal: write your feelings or memories.

Write a letter to the one who died, expressing your thoughts and feelings.

Have a "Family Circle" or "Talking Circle" time to share memories and stories.

Reach out! Others often do not know what to say or do in the face of your family's pain.

### ***Children and the Holidays***

Children express grief differently than adults. It is sometimes difficult to tell that they are grieving. Often, children will hide feelings from a parent to protect the parent. It is difficult for a child to hold intense feelings for very long. Children often fluctuate between playing with abandonment and hidden or open tears.

It is okay for your children to know that you are sad. If you are able to talk with them about the loss, acknowledge that the holidays hold special memories that can bring about many feelings. Invite them to talk with you. If you are too overwhelmed, ask other family members to be available for the children.

Is there something special that the deceased did for your child(ren) each year? Is it something that you or someone else can do? What "gifts" or traditions did your loved one leave that your family can keep?

Encourage your children to participate in helping others during the holidays. Thoughtful, planned, careful giving can contribute to a sense of control that is so often lost when a loved one dies.

Check for grief support groups in your area. They are usually offered at nominal or no cost. Hospices and hospitals sometimes offer these. Check for children's grief support programs at [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org).