

How to Help Ourselves Through the Holidays

You will survive the holidays.

You may hurt, but you will survive.

- It's O.K. not to have a good time – there may be no way you can this year.
- It's also O.K. to have a good time
- Family get-togethers may be extremely difficult. Be honest with each other about your feelings. Sit down with you family and decide what you want to do for the holiday season. Don't set expectations too high for yourself or the day. If you wish things to be the same, you are going to be disappointed.
- There is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Some may wish to follow family traditions, while others may choose to change them. It may help to do things just a little differently. What you choose the first year, you don't have to do the next.
- Set limitations. Realize that it isn't going to be easy. Do things that are very special and/or important to you. Do the best that you can.
- Once you have made the decision on how you and your family will handle the holidays, let relatives and friends know.
- Plan shopping trips ahead of time, or try creative alternatives – try giving away some of your loved one's treasured possessions as a gift, i.e. favourite book, dvd, tools, art, photographs, and enclose a note why it was chosen.
- Shop by mail; give cash or cheques; perhaps exchange gives later; have others help you wrap gifts.
- Buy a beautiful candle and light it each day. The whole house will seem warmer.
- Baking and cleaning the house can get out of proportion. If these chores are enjoyable, go ahead, but not to the point that it is tiring. If possible, this year you could either buy baked goods, or go without.
- For an empty spot at the table, fill the plate with greenery, a cherub or candle.
- One possibility for the first year may be to visit relatives, friends, or even go away on a vacation. Planning, packing, etc., keeps your mind somewhat off the holiday and you share the time in a different and hopefully less painful setting.
- How do you answer "Happy Holidays?" You may say, "I'll try" or "Best wishes to you." You will think of many answers that you don't say.

- If you are accustomed to having dinner at your home, change and go to relatives; or change the time (instead of 2:00 p.m., make it 4:00 p.m.). Serving buffet style and/or eating in a different room may help.
- Try attending holiday services at a different time and/or place of worship.
- Worrying about crying is an additional burden. If you let go and cry, you probably will feel better. It should not ruin the day for the other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom.
- Consider cutting back on your card sending. It is not necessary to send cards, especially to those people you will see over the holidays.
- Do something for someone else, such as volunteer work at a soup kitchen or visit the lonely and shut-ins. Ask someone who is alone to share the day with your family. Provide help for a needy family. Donate a gift or money in your loved one's name.
- Share your concerns, feelings, apprehensions, etc., as the holiday approaches, with a relative or friend. Tell them that this is a difficult time for you. Accept their help. You will appreciate their love and support at this time.
- Holidays often magnify feelings of loss of a loved one. It is important and natural to experience the sadness that comes. To block such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved one alive.
- **Don't forget: "Anticipation of any holiday is so much worse than the actual holiday".**