

# Holiday Coping Tips

Here are some suggestions for people experiencing bereavement and/or injury for coping during the holidays:

- Plan ahead for the approaching holidays. Accept that this might be a difficult time for you. The additional stress this season brings may impact you emotionally, physically and spiritually. These are normal reactions. Be prepared for rushes of emotions that may occur.
- Recognize that the holidays might not be the same as they were in the past. Expecting everything to seem the same might lead to disappointment. Modify or make new traditions if it feels right. Just remember to include others who are grieving, especially children, in decisions.
- Go away if you feel you will be devastated by staying home. But remember that November and December holidays are celebrated the world over. You can't fully escape. You may do better by facing your pain and being near the people who love you.
- Relive the happy memories. Pick three special memories of holidays past with your loved one. Think of them often - and celebrate them.
- Counter the moments of uncomfortable silence. Because family and friends love you, they will think they are doing you a favor by not mentioning your loved one. Openly state that it is important for you to talk about your loved one during the holiday season when he/she is so much on your mind. Burn a memorial candle.
- Don't overwhelm or over commit yourself. Give yourself a reprieve. Take time for yourself and take care of yourself. Take it slow and easy, one step at a time.
- Be careful not to isolate yourself. It is all right to take time for yourself, but try not to cut yourself off from the support of family and friends.
- The holidays may affect other family members. Talk to others as you make plans and share your feelings. Respect other's choices and needs, and compromise if necessary.
- Expect to experience some feelings of emotional pain. When the feelings come, let them.
- Accept a few invitations to be with close family or friends. Choose the ones that sound most appealing at the time and decline the ones that feel more like an obligation.
- Talk about your feelings. Let people know if you are having a tough day.
- Share your favorite stories with others and make a toast or light a candle in honor and remembrance.

For many people, this is a season of celebrations. However, the holidays are often a difficult time for those who are bereaved and coping with grief due to a death or serious injury. You now face the holidays, and someone you love has been killed. At this time of year, intact families are everywhere on television, in magazine ads, and on holiday cards, joyfully celebrating each other. You may feel overwhelmed as you face a very empty chair at your table.

Many bereaved and injured people face this season with apprehension often in fear of their emotional reactions to what are supposed to be happy, memorable moments. A common question asked by those mourning a loved one or struggling to make sense of other losses is, "How can I get through the holidays?" There is no single answer of what we should or should not do, but it is important that we consider what activities are comfortable for us to participate in during the holidays.

When everyone else appears so happy and cheerful; it is easy to feel alone. You may feel out of sorts with the holiday season. Recognizing that the holidays can be painful often helps ease that sense of isolation. If you need any additional assistance, please call 1-877-MADD-HELP (877-623-3435). MADD is just one call away.



## *Care Tips for Family and Friends*

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Friends and relatives sometimes fail to realize how significant they can be in enabling the grieving to get through the holidays. More distant acquaintances will absent themselves in their own flurry of holiday activity. Many simply acknowledge that they don't want to face pain during a time that is traditionally joyful.

You can be a healing agent to those you love this holiday season. Following are suggestions to help you.

- Ask to help with specific tasks. "Call me if you need me" is not a useful offer. Instead say, "I'd love to do some shopping for you when I do mine. May I?" or "I imagine decorating the house will be hard this year. Could I come help you or do it for you some morning?"
- Be a good listener. The holiday will draw out deep feelings for surviving families. Many will feel they must talk about their loved one. Hear their feelings and accept them. Learn to be comfortable with silences and don't feel you need to interrupt them.
- Write a holiday letter. Many things can be said on paper which may be difficult to say in person. A letter can be treasured, read again and again, and kept forever.
- Invite the bereaved to social outings. Don't assume he or she should go or wouldn't go. Simply ask, and accept the response. It won't hurt to ask a second time a few days later if the first response was negative, but the decision is still theirs.
- Give a gift or make a donation in memory of the one who has been killed.
- Mention the name of the one who has been killed often. It is important for the bereaved to speak and hear their loved one's name. It may be painful, but the pain is already there and the opportunity to talk about the one they miss so much will be cherished.



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