

Remembering Loved Ones who have Died

(During the Holidays)

Holidays can create feelings of dread and anxiety in those who are bereaved. The clichéd images of family togetherness and the often unrealistic expectations of a season filled with picture-perfect, joyful gatherings can cause tremendous stress for those who are not grieving-let alone those in the midst of the painful, isolating experience of loss. How does one celebrate the holidays when a loved one is so sorely missed? Creating new rituals and new traditions that pay tribute to the memory of the deceased is one way to survive, and perhaps even embrace the holidays when a loved one has died. Here are some suggestions of what you can do.

1. Decorate a wreath with pictures and items that were loved by the person who died and place the wreath on his/her grave.
2. Wrap a favorite keepsake of the deceased or a framed photo of your loved one, and give as a gift to another grieving family member.
3. Tell the stories associated with the ornaments on the Christmas tree and the role your loved one played in making those memories.
4. Create (or purchase) a special ornament labeled with the name of the deceased and hang it on the tree.
5. Decorate a candle and light it at mealtime in memory of your loved one. If you celebrate Chanukah, recall a memory of a deceased on each of the eight nights that you light the menorah.
6. Make a book of photos and memorabilia related to the deceased to give as a gift or simply share with one another. This is a good activity for children as well.
7. Make a donation to a favorite charity in memory of the deceased. Create a scholarship to keep the memory of the deceased alive and announce it at a holiday gathering of family and friends.
8. Purchase a holiday book-perhaps a favorite of the deceased and donate it to your local library or school. Ask your librarian to place a label inside the front cover inscribed, "In memory of (and your loved one's name)."
9. Bring your loved one's favorite food to share at a holiday dinner. Mention their name during the blessing over the meal or propose a toast in their memory.
10. Share anecdotes and favorite stories about the person who died. Sometime others need permission to talk about the deceased. Let them know that you would rather keep the memory of your loved one alive than pretend nothing has changed.
11. Encourage grieving children to draw pictures and create gifts inspired by their memories of the deceased to give to other family members.
12. Decorate and hang a paper cutout of a star in your home with your hopes and dreams for the future. Thinking about tomorrow is part of your healing.