



Caring for Ourselves
Through the Holidays

With the approach of fall and winter, those of us who have lost a loved one may find it hard to keep up with the hustle and bustle this time of year brings. We may find it difficult to enjoy familiar activities or family traditions because we are grieving. Many of us may not be prepared to deal with the emotional and physical aspects of grief, which can make getting through the holiday season challenging. Haven wants to offer you some helpful guidelines on how to prepare for the approaching holidays.

Look at Your Fears

Anticipation of the holidays is almost always worse than the actual event. Looking at the sources of your discomfort can help you make decisions about what you choose to do or not do. Ask yourself the following questions:

- » Are you dreading the entire holiday season or specific times or traditions without your loved one?
- » Do you think you might “lose it” in front of people by crying and feeling out of control?
- » Are you afraid of feeling angry toward others who can more easily enjoy the holidays because they have not lost someone dear to them?
- » Are you afraid people will not mention your loved one because they think reminding you of your loss will upset you?
- » Are you afraid people will talk too much about your loved one and not allow any celebration?
- » Are you afraid of having to pretend you are enjoying yourself when you are feeling down?
- » Are you afraid of being alone or feeling like a fifth wheel wherever you go?
- » Are you afraid of feeling your grief more intensely as holiday memories remind you of special times with your loved one?

Remember Your Loved One

This time of year can bring up deep emotions. You may remember past memories and times cherished with your loved one. It is important to find ways to memorialize him/her. Here are some suggestions:

- » Light a candle next to his/her picture to remember and honor the person's life.
- » Write your loved one a thank you card about what you have learned from him/her and how your loved one had an impact on your life.
- » Buy a gift you would have bought for your loved one, and donate it to a local charity in his/her name.
- » Offer a prayer or toast to your loved one.
- » Create a special ornament for display in honor of the person.
- » Ask members of the family to write down what they are most thankful for having received from the loved one, wrap it and put it under the tree.
- » Display a single fresh flower during the holidays.
- » Attend a holiday grief support program in your area offered by Haven or your place of worship.
- » Plant a tree in memory of your loved one.
- » Spend time with people you feel comfortable sharing memories of your loved one with.

Create Support for Yourself

Sharing your pain eases it. Find the people who will listen and walk with you through this painful time. When spouses or family members hurt as much as you do and cannot be a support, find an alternative, perhaps a friend, another grieving person or a counselor.

The people who are there for me include:

Plan Ahead... for How and Where to Spend the Holidays

Planning ahead can decrease anxiety. Sit down with family members and discuss what each member wants or needs. Is it really important to send cards, bake or decorate? Let others know what you want. Many people wish to keep their holiday traditions intact and try to celebrate as usual. This can be difficult to do as the death of the person you loved has created an obvious void in your life. Just be aware that it will not be the same.

Some people choose not to celebrate at all. They might go on a vacation, to the movies or some other distracting place. Others try to begin a new tradition or keep the comforting ones and not the painful ones. The more we try to recreate the past, the more obvious is our loss. Changing some traditions can be an alternative and satisfying way to spend the season. Be flexible and play it by ear. Do what feels right for you. There are no right or wrong answers. Use this checklist to help you decide how to plan for the holidays. Share with your family and compare.

Holiday Activities	Is it important to me?	Do I want to continue?	Make changes? How?
Send cards			
Decorate inside			
Decorate outside			
Shop for gifts			
Exchange gifts with family			
Exchange gifts with friends			
Cooking or baking			
Attend religious services			
Attend holiday programs			
Listen to holiday music			
Holiday dinners			
Family gatherings			
House cleaning			
Entertaining			
Other			

You Will Survive

You may hurt, but you will survive. The holidays may be some of the most challenging times for you. Eventually you will heal and your memories will persist without pain. In the meantime, it is okay not to have a good time, and it is okay to have a good time. Stay present in the moment and accept whatever support is given. Cry if you need to, but don't deny yourself love, laughter and life because someone you loved has died. Death teaches us, more than anything, that every day is precious and worth living to the fullest. The best gift we can give ourselves and others is to live our lives to the fullest.

Be open to both giving and receiving love. Forgive yourself when you fall short. Know that your life is richer for loving.

*“What we have once
enjoyed we can never
lose. All that we love
deeply becomes a part
of us.”*

—Helen Keller



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CHÚ Ý: Nếu bạn nói Tiếng Việt, có các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí dành cho bạn. Gọi số 1-800-727-1889.

ATENÇÃO: Se fala português, encontram-se disponíveis serviços linguísticos, grátis. Ligue para 1-800-727-1889.

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PAUNAWA: Kung nagsasalita ka ng Tagalog, maaari kang gumamit ng mga serbisyo ng tulong sa wika nang walang bayad. Tumawag sa 1-800-727-1889.

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ملحوظة: إذا كنت تتحدث اذكر اللغة، فإن خدمات المساعدة اللغوية تتوافر لك بالمجان. اتصل برقم 1-800-727-1889

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ACHTUNG: Wenn Sie Deutsch sprechen, stehen Ihnen kostenlos sprachliche Hilfsdienstleistungen zur Verfügung. Rufnummer: 1-800-727-1889.

주의: 한국어를 사용하시는 경우, 언어 지원 서비스를 무료로 이용하실 수 있습니다. 1-800-727-1889 번으로 전화해 주십시오.

UWAGA: Jeżeli mówisz po polsku, możesz skorzystać z bezpłatnej pomocy językowej. Zadzwoń pod numer 1-800-727-1889.

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เรียน: ถ้าคุณพูดภาษาไทยคุณสามารถใช้บริการช่วยเหลือทางภาษาได้ฟรี โทร 1-800-727-1889.



If you need further support or have questions, please contact your social worker or our Healing Hearts program at 1.844.LIGHTEN or visit BeYourHaven.org.