HOW WILL I GET THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS?
12 IDEAS FOR THOSE WHOSE LOVED ONE HAS DIED
By James E. Miller

1. Accept the likelihood of your pain.
   - Chances are it will be a painful time.
   - Your pain is a sign that you have been blessed to have close relationships.
   - There will be difficult moments, but the holidays don’t have to be “horrendous”.
   - Sometimes the anticipation is worse than the actual experience.

2. Feel whatever it is you feel.
   - You will have emotional reactions to the impact of the holidays.
   - You are human.
   - No one else will feel exactly the way you do, when you do, with the same intensity.
   - Some feelings you may experience:
     1. Sadness: It is sad to think about what you have lost, what can never happen again, what you’ll have to learn to live without.
     2. Depression: You may feel desolate or despairing, depleted of all energy, listlessness, and alone.
     3. Anxiety: You may feel nervous and jittery, ill at ease and full of uncertainty.
     4. Fear: You may be afraid of what will happen to you, how you will cope, what you will do, even if you will survive.
     5. Anger: You may be mad at people who don’t understand or support you, angry about the death, upset with yourself, with God or with the whole world.
     6. Guilt: You may dwell upon what you did or didn’t do, feel guilty you are living and they are not, or that you have moments of happiness.
     7. Apathy: You may feel no feelings; feel numb, confused and disoriented.

3. Express your emotions.
   - You must find a release for what is going on inside of you.
• Express yourself in a way that works for you. Possibilities are limitless.
  1. **Cry.**
  2. **Talk.** Find people who will listen and not judge your feelings
  3. **Write.** Keep a journal, write a letter to the deceased, write poems or compose stories, or record your dreams.
  4. **Music.** Sing, play an instrument, compose a song.
  5. **Pray.**
  6. **Create.** Make something out of wood, mold clay, quilt, or paint.

4. **Plan ahead.**
   • Identify what will be the more difficult parts of the holidays.
   • Ask for help in thinking about what you will do and carrying out tasks.
   • Give thought to the various choices you have in spending the holidays.
   • Divide your tasks into smaller, more manageable units.
   • Give yourself the freedom to change your plans.

5. **Take charge where you can.**
   • Identify what aspects of the holidays are meaningful to you and which ones you can forego.
   • Decide if there are traditions that can be modified to fit the new circumstances of the loss.
   • Try not to make drastic changes, but some changes can be healthy and important.
   • Eat healthfully and drink wisely, maintain an exercise program, get some sleep, and practice those things that give you energy.

6. **Turn to others for support.**
   • You may have to let people know how they can help, be straightforward about what you think will help and what will not.
   • Seek out those who will let you talk or cry or do whatever you need to do.
   • Contact local bereavement support programs for counseling or join a grief group.

7. **Be gentle with yourself.**
   • Give yourself time to rest and be forgiving of yourself.
   • Don’t over commit yourself and allow yourself to cancel plans if you need to.
   • Give yourself permission to ease holiday demands and set easy-to-attain goals.
8. **Remember to remember.**
   - Find an object that you can carry, wear, use, or place in easy sight that will link you with the one who died.
   - Create a small remembrance area in your home.
   - Honor your loved one with a ritual of remembrance.
   - Don’t force yourself to remember if you don’t feel up to it - you’ll know when the time is right.

9. **Search out and count your blessings.**
   - Remain as open as you can to what you appreciate.
   - Stay present in the moment and accept the warmth that is yours to receive, however fleeting.

10. **Do something for others.**
    - Find moments to place your attention outside of yourself.
    - It can be something that takes an hour or days – see what is right for you.
    - Volunteer, help a neighbor, or assist a stranger. The possibilities are limitless.

11. **Give voice to your “soul”.**
    - An inner part of yourself is involved in the grief, separate from your body, mind, or feelings.
    - Honor the questions that you may find yourself asking that affect your spiritual beliefs.
    - Consider making room in your days for the expression of your soul (prayer, meditation, reading, etc.).

12. **Harbor hope.**
    - Stay open to the demands of this experience. There is hope for your healing and growth.