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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.