



Hospice Calgary
Sage Centre | Rosedale Hospice
Compassionate Support When Life Changes



For more information, please contact
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Inside this Booklet

Coping with the Holidays.....	2
Holiday Checklist	3
Traditions and Rituals	4
Ideas for Creating New Memories	5
Helping Children Cope with the Holidays	6
Help for the Holiday Season	7
The Three C's of Coping with the Holidays	8

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

- Give yourself permission to not live up to other people's expectations.
- It's okay to say no to invitations.
- Do only as much as you can comfortably manage.
- Choose what is best for you, whether it is to be with people or to spend time alone.

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

- People want to help, but unless you tell them how they can, they may remain distant out of concern that they will upset you.

CREATE SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF

- Sharing your pain and loss may help to ease it.
- Try to find people in your life that can hear your pain and are willing to listen to you.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE HOLIDAYS WILL BE DIFFERENT

- You may choose to keep your holiday traditions intact and celebrate as usual or avoid celebrating the holidays altogether.
- You might want to create some ritual that would be meaningful to you and would honour your loved one.

DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU HOW TO GRIEVE

- Follow your heart and feelings when it comes to grieving—not the expectations of others.
- There is no such thing as "should" right now—don't feel you need to (or should) act one way or another.

TRY TO NOT FEEL GUILTY FOR LAUGHING OR CRYING

- Accept whatever feelings you have during this time of year.

AVOID ADDITIONAL STRESSORS

- Even when not facing grief, the holidays bring added stress for most. Are there things you can do before the holidays to avoid stress later?

Adapted from North Coast Journal 2003; "When the Holidays Hurt."
and "Surviving Holidays, Birthdays and Anniversaries" by Brook Noel

HOLIDAY CHECKLIST

Place a CHECK mark beside what you would traditionally do and then CIRCLE what you might want to do this year. Share this and talk about it with your friends and family.

TRADITIONS

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Go to an entirely new place
- Bake the usual holiday foods
- Buy the usual holiday foods
- Attend religious services
- Do not attend religious services
- Attend services at a different time
- Attend totally different services
- Spend some quiet time alone
- Visit the cemetery
- Open gifts on Christmas Eve
- Open gifts on Christmas Day

SHOPPING

- Shop as usual
- Give cash
- Shop on-line or through catalogues
- Ask for help
- Shop early
- Make your gifts
- Give baked goods
- Shop with a friend
- Ask for help wrapping gifts
- Change gift giving/receiving to another time
- Make a list of gifts you want before you go out

GREETING CARDS

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Include a letter
- Elect to skip this year

DECORATIONS

- Decorate as usual
- Modify your decorations
- Ask for help
- Let others do it
- Put up an artificial tree instead of a real one
- Have a special decoration for your loved one
- Eliminate the tree or other decorations

DINNER

- Prepare as usual
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Eat alone
- Change time of dinner
- Change routine of dinner (buffet)
- Change location of dinner (different room)
- Ask for help
- Cook something to honour your loved one

THE NEW YEAR

- Spend time as you usually would
- Remove decorations early
- Go out of town
- Avoid New Year's Eve parties
- Attend a New Year's Eve party
- Hold a New Year's Eve party
- Spend time with only a few friends
- Write down your hopes for the New Year
- Go to a movie
- Go to bed early

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

Take another look at holiday traditions:

- Ask yourself and those you love if you want to carry out the same traditions.
- Do you need to eliminate some, incorporate new or alter existing traditions slightly?

When considering those traditions to keep, review or eliminate, ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy doing this?
- Is this a task that can be shared by other loved ones?

It may help to do or make something symbolic.

- Any activity you invent (or borrow) that allows you to meaningfully mark your loved one's absence, yet still allows you to celebrate the holidays with those you love, who remain.

Change is often scary, but it can also be helpful.

- You may want to open presents or have dinner at a different time.
- You may want to let others take over something like decorating the tree or making cookies.

Take one holiday at a time.

- Whatever you choose this year to make the holidays easier is not written in stone.
- You do not have to do the same thing(s) next year or every other year.
- Try to concern yourself only with what you want to do this year.
- You can always revise your plans for next year.

Adapted from "Getting through the holidays" by J. Hamilton and "Surviving Holidays, Birthdays and Anniversaries" by Brook Noel

IDEAS FOR EMBRACING MEMORIES

Create a memory tree. Everyone can bring an ornament made or purchased in your loved one's memory to decorate the tree.

Share stories of your loved one. Get family and friends together to share their memories.

Create a memory book over the holidays. This can be done on your own or with family members and friends. Creating a memory book is a wonderful keepsake about your loved one.

Put together a collage. Through collage, rubber stamping, gathering of pictures and paper decorations, we can create a beautiful remembrance.

Play music. Play music that is meaningful to you or your loved one.

Talk about your loved one and your grief. Share your memories; find supportive and comforting people to listen.

IDEAS FOR CREATING NEW MEMORIES



Hanging Stockings

Some families place small notes inside the stocking and read them whenever they wish. Sometimes it's easier to hang the "special" stocking in a place apart from the others. Do what feels right for you and your family.



Candles

Light a special candle in celebration of the memory of a life and the love shared. Select a candle in your loved one's favourite colour and/or scent.



Dinner

Set a special place at the dinner table and have everyone write a letter or note and place it on the person's plate. Or volunteer your time to serve a Christmas meal in memory of your loved one.



Gifts

Buy a gift for your absent loved one and give it away to someone who would otherwise not have a gift. Consider adopting a family for Christmas. Or give money you would have spent for gifts to a charity in your family member's name.



Reach out to others

A donation of food, clothing, goods or your time to a person or cause could be done in the memory of your loved one. Giving and caring for others can ease your pain and help the healing process.



Decorate the memorial site with a holiday theme

Place a small tree or wreath at the graveside. Decorating could also include flowers, garlands, bows, pinecones or packages—whatever is meaningful for you.



Choose a holiday story

Find a story that you can read together as a family. Consider donating money to the public library to buy the book and have it dedicated to your loved one's memory.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH THE HOLIDAYS



Include children in discussions about the holidays.



Talk to them about what the holidays will be like now.



Ask them what they want and what they don't want. It is best to know ahead of time what is going to happen rather than approach the day or days without any plans.



Get their ideas about a gift or donation in memory of your loved one.



Involve them in tradition and memory making. They are extremely creative and have wonderful ideas.



Some may need a break from the family. Some may want to spend time with friends.



Give them opportunities to talk about their loss and grief, as well as the holiday changes that are taking place.



Give them opportunities to play and enjoy the holiday season.

Adapted from materials by John Saynor

HELP FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

By Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Rather than times of family togetherness, sharing and thankfulness, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

LOVE DOES NOT END WITH DEATH

Holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief – a feeling unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living.

TALK ABOUT YOUR GRIEF

Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better.

BE TOLERANT OF YOUR PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS

Feelings of loss will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down.

ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY STRESS

Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely “keeping busy” won't distract you from your grief.

BE WITH SUPPORTIVE, COMFORTING PEOPLE

Spend time with friends and relatives who encourage you to be happy and sad, to be yourself and accept your feelings.

MENTION THE NAME OF THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED

If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was important in your life.

DO WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Friends and family who mean well often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with those closest to you.

THE THREE C's OF COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

By Kenneth J. Doka

The holidays are a tough time to grieve. Knowing that does not make them any easier, but at least it may help us understand and accept our reactions and tap into the things we can do to help ourselves cope with the holidays.



During the holidays it is easy to drift into activities that increase our pain. But we do have **choices**. We can decide what activities we wish to participate in, who we want to be with, and what we want to do. One of the choices we may want to consider is how to mark the loss during the holidays. During the holidays we feel the presence of that person's absence. Finding ways to recognize and acknowledge that individual can bring positive focus to our grief. This may be done in a number of ways such as lighting a candle, creating a ritual, or a moment of silence.



It is important that we discuss our choices with others, especially those who are affected by them. Remember, they have needs as well. Their ways of dealing with grief may be different, so **communication** is very important for all concerned. For example, have a family discussion about whether or not a tree is wanted.



Each of us deals with loss in our own particular way. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. When we communicate, we may find out that our feelings and needs—the very ways that we cope—will differ. We need to find space to **compromise** and deal with our loss in our own way.

Nothing changes the fact that the holidays can be especially difficult while grieving. But as we *choose* our actions, *communicate* our choices and find suitable *compromises*, we may find that they are bearable. And that gives us renewed strength and hope.

About Hospice Calgary

In a compassionate environment, Hospice Calgary embraces children, teens and adults coping with life-threatening illness, sudden or expected death. At Sage Centre and Rosedale Hospice, our specialists provide individual counselling, group support, workshops and 24-hour end-of-life care. We know transitions take time—we are here as long as needed.

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