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TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS

1 HONOR YOURSELF

Knowing the holidays are coming, anticipate that feelings might be triggered, such as sadness, isolation, loneliness, anger, and maybe even joy in remembering. Give yourself and your family permission to experience these feelings when they arise. Cry if you feel like crying. Laugh if you feel like laughing. Punch a bag if you feel like punching. Be gentle with yourself.

2 MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Anticipate that even caring family members and friends might impose their expectations on what you should or should not do. Figure out what is important to you and your family, and communicate your preferences to others. You might decide to maintain traditions or create new ones. Either is fine. Give yourself permission to do what is right for you.

3 PLAN AHEAD

Often the anticipation of a particular day is more difficult than the day itself. Having a plan ahead of time can ease feelings of anxiety and the fear of the unknown. Include even the youngest children in planning, because they too have a stake in what happens. Share your plans with family and friends and let them know of any changes to your holiday routine.

4 EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Grief is unpredictable. It will challenge you every step of the way. People who are grieving often don't feel like themselves, or have the energy they once enjoyed. While you think you will feel one way, it could be that the opposite occurs. Be patient with yourself and willing to adjust your expectations, as well as your plans.

5 SET REALISTIC GOALS

Things are different now. Decide if you can handle the responsibilities you've had in the past, and allow yourself to say "No." Be honest about your feelings and circumstances. Be realistic when planning what you can do, what you can afford, and how you can make the most of the holidays.

6 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT

It can feel normal to isolate yourself during the holidays or to want to be surrounded by others. Talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling. For those who offer to help you, let them know what you do and do not need from them, because they won't know. Take others up on offers to cook, shop, decorate, etc. and be open to asking for help.

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7 BE CAREFUL OF “SHOULD”

Do the things that are special and important to you and your family, and let go of the rest. Realize that you may not have the energy you did before the death. Try to avoid thinking: “I should be doing this” or feeling obligated to live up to someone else’s expectation. Life is different now, and new roles and responsibilities might be needed. Enjoy what you can enjoy, and endure only what you must endure.

8 MEMORIALIZE THE PERSON WHO DIED

Involve children in the process of planning out how to incorporate the person who died into the holidays. Continue your bond with that person, whether it's by creating a memory box, writing them letters, setting a placemat for them at the table, sharing memories and photos, or any other way you decide.

9 DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE

Give a gift or donate to a charity, in memory of your person who died. Either as an individual or as a family, help another needy family, volunteer in a soup kitchen, or assist some other cause. Oftentimes helping others can have a healing effect when you reinvest in living and loving again.

10 OPEN YOUR HEART

Even though the holidays can be difficult, they can also be a time of healing. Tune into joyful moments and look for opportunities to laugh. Memories can sometimes be a source of comfort, even through tears. Open your heart and experience connections with loved ones. You are entitled to find some joy.