

Strategies for Bereaved People During the Holiday Season

Margaret Robinson

1. Acknowledge the holiday season will be different and difficult.
2. Plan - don't drift. The worst forebodings are never the reality.
3. Accept your limitations.
4. Give yourself permission to make changes and eliminate activities that may be too painful/stressful this Christmas. Create new traditions - a framed picture on the tree, a special angel, a remembrance candle - something that is meaningful for you.
5. Make Christmas the season, not just the day. (December 1 - January 7)
6. Do only one thing at a time.
7. Choose activities that bring peace and joy, not pain and chaos.
8. Don't overspend to compensate, whether you are spending time, money or energy.
9. Plan your shopping ahead: make a list, go on a good day, shop by catalogue or ask a friend to accompany you.
10. The tree symbolizes the permanency of love and continuation of life. Getting it up is half the battle: do it early in the season, and invite friends (children and/or adults) to help.
11. Take some time to discuss with your family, and find out what everyone wishes for. Negotiate, compromise until you arrive at a plan meeting everyone's needs.
12. Be honest with your feelings - with everyone else, and especially with yourself.
13. Keep the children informed, always. Tell them the truth, cry with them.
14. Accept the grieving process. Be non-judgmental of family members or friends whose grief may be expressed differently than yours.
15. Plan to be with people whose company you enjoy.
16. Give yourself permission to do what you need to do; leave early, bow out.
17. Spend some time alone. Write in your journal, listen to uplifting music, meditate, pray. Be in touch with your feelings. Be prepared for tears; they are healing.
18. Nurture yourself: buy yourself a gift, attend a concert, go skating in the park.
19. Eat nutritiously and exercise to keep yourself healthy.
20. Laugh! Watch a funny movie.
21. Change family traditions around (gift giving/opening, location of family dinner), maybe just for this year.
22. Reminisce with the family album - celebrate the relationships.
23. At the dinner table, include your loved one's name in the blessing, have a moment of silence or prayer, go around the table and ask everyone to share a special memory.
24. Gather with family/friends at the gravesite, place a Christmas decoration, spend some time in prayer or silence.
25. Give a gift in your loved one's name: a food bank donation, a floral tribute at church, a book to the library.
26. Give a gift of time to someone who will be alone - a foreign student, elderly person, or single parent family.
27. Let people know your needs. Be gracious in accepting an outstretched hand; it is given in love.
28. Don't "should" on yourself.
29. Remember that nothing is set in stone; you can change anything next year.
30. C - clear your mind; release your feelings and bring them to the surface where you can deal with them.
O - organize - examine your traditions and set priorities appropriate to your emotional load.
P - plan how you will survive the holiday season. Nothing is ever as bad as your worst imaginings.
E - execute your carefully considered plan. Stand back, take a second look at them, and be prepared to be flexible.