

Surviving the Holidays

The holidays have a way of magnifying grief. There are ways to cope.

H. Healthy Choices. Remain physical. Get up and walk. Enjoy healthy foods; high sugar and fattening foods seem like comfort foods, but often contribute to depression.

O. Own the season. Do what is right for you. Don't let anyone dictate how you're supposed to feel. There are zero obligations to family functions in the first year after a loss. Explain precisely what you are/are not able to perform this year.

L. Leave. Create a gesture or an expression that tips off a spouse or close friend when the function becomes unbearable. Often having an escape plan marshals enough courage to make it through an event.

I. Invite/Include. Seek others who likewise may be struggling with loss through the holidays, and invite them to join you. Kindred spirits make the grief journey less tiresome, and may provide a safe place to share candidly.

D. Donate. Would the child have been a boy? Consider choosing an Angel Tree child who might be the same age or gender and provide a gift for that child. Or mark your child's life with a memorial gift to a favorite charity.

A. Allow for strong emotions. The trappings of the season shout, "Jolly! Jolly! Jolly!" while you feel like crying. Take time to feel exactly what you are feeling. (Flipside: You may catch yourself feeling a bit of JOY. That's OK, too. No guilt.)

Y. "Yet". Learn to add the word "yet" to your conversations. When folks pressure you with expectations of how you ought to feel/act simply say, "I am just not there yet." Allow yourself space to grow while avoiding declarations of failure.

S. Serve others. Grief is like boot camp for self-care. It demands our attention. Grant yourself a brief reprieve by doing something others-centered. Volunteer.

(These suggestions and many more can be found at websites "Faces of Loss," "Grieve Outloud," and "Grief Share.")