

Grief and the *Holidays*



How can I help myself?

- **Build on tradition.** For the holiday meal, place a lighted candle on the table in honor of the deceased; include one of his/her favorite foods. Create a memorial ornament or decoration. If the person who has died always played a special role in holiday festivities, formally ask another family member to carry on the tradition.
- **If tradition is too painful,** change the way you celebrate. Instead of putting up a Christmas tree indoors, decorate an outdoor tree with lights and food items for the birds. Go out for dinner with friends or family instead of trying to have a crowd in for a holiday meal. Instead of staying at home, where memories may be strongest, take a holiday trip.
- **Do something for others.** Volunteer to help others, through your place of worship or a charity. Invite someone who is alone during the holiday to join you and your family for a meal, a religious service, or an activity such as a concert. Make a donation to a favorite cause in memory of the deceased.
- **Help yourself adjust.** Let others know that you might not participate in all the usual festivities. For example, you may feel like attending a religious service, but not the gathering that follows. Feel free to change plans at the last minute. Cry if you need to. Let others know if it's OK for them to share their memories of the deceased with you.

Taken from Harvard Women's Health Watch, 2002,
Fran Atkins, PhD, RN, CNS

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Helping those who grieve this holiday season

"Give me right words, O Lord; speak, and thy servant shall hear thee." Psalms 17:1



- **Let someone talk.** Do ask about the deceased. Help someone reminisce.
- **Don't try to make it better.** Statements like "Cheer up," "It was God's will," and "You'll get over it" are not helpful.
- **Hang in there.** Give your gift of presence, even when you feel pained and helpless. Company is especially helpful after the funeral, when friends and family return to their regular lives.
- **Lend a hand.** Offer to do something specific, like chores or errands, even if you are not sure it's the right thing to do. Grieving people may be unable to say what they need.
- **Keep your promises.** Grieving people feel abandoned if you don't follow through on pledges to call, visit, or ask them over.
- **Don't judge or dictate how someone grieves.** People grieve in their own ways, and their shifting needs (whether or not to discuss the deceased, for example) may be inconsistent. Take your cues from them.
- **Be open to holiday changes.** Someone who is grieving may wish to alter certain holiday traditions or withdraw from full participation.

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