

# Coping Through the Holidays

## Zusman Hospice Bereavement Support



### Coping Through the Holidays & Special Days

Holidays and special days present challenges even when our lives are running smoothly. These days bring us together to celebrate traditions or honor an individual, and the absence of a loved one is deeply felt. Often, we aren't just dealing with one day to get through, but a whole season and all of the anticipation that goes with it. Other difficult days include weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, reunions and graduations. We do have some control over what happens on these days, if we choose to take it. Let's look at the four Cs of coping with the holidays and special days:

#### Communicate Your Needs

Communicate your needs and concerns clearly to those around you. Families who sit down together and discuss the holiday ahead of time do much better and avoid some of the fatigue, resentment and disappointment that can surface. What does each family member need to make it a special day? What can comfortably be put on hold? What changes will make things more bearable? Can the responsibility for the holiday be shared among several family members?

#### Change Your Routines

A few families stick exactly to traditions, but most families find it helpful to make changes, minor or major. Having a meal at a different location or different time of day can help. Going out to eat can ease some stress. Opening gifts at a different time or

Ways to externalize the loss  
– give it a time and a place:

A prayer before the Holiday dinner, about your loved one.

Light a candle  
for your loved one.

Create an online tribute  
for them.

Share a favorite story  
about your loved one.

Have everyone tell a funny  
story about your loved one.

At your place of worship  
remember them in a prayer.

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location might work. Families who find worship routines too full of memories might attend a different service with a friend or neighbor. If you find yourself dreading a certain part of the holiday rituals, use your creativity to find an alternative. Sometimes we worry that if we change or drop a tradition, we will lose it forever. It might help to be clear that we are just putting that particular piece of the holiday on hold until some time has helped with the healing.

### **Cut Back On Your Activities**

Grief is physically and mentally fatiguing. You also may be experiencing some disorientation or lack of motivation and disorganization. Streamlining commitments during holidays is an important self-care activity. You probably won't lose friends if you skip cards or send them more selectively. Gift certificates, catalogs and shopping online can help you avoid distressing shopping trips. Limiting the time you spend at family and social gatherings can conserve precious energy. While it's important to touch base with family members and special friends, setting realistic limits is essential. If you find yourself involved in an activity that just doesn't feel good, give yourself permission to withdraw.

### **Celebrate the Memory of Your Loved One**

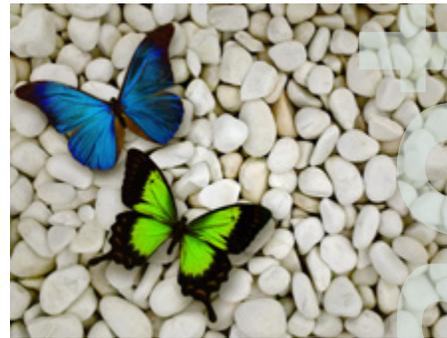
The word celebrate can also mean "to honor." Many families choose to set aside a special time or create a special way in which to honor the memory of those who are no longer there to share the special day. Some make a gift or donation in their love one's name. Others light a candle or put out a picture or photo album. A time to share favorite stories or memories can be valuable. Everyone will be thinking of the person who is gone, and having a constructive way to acknowledge the loss together is helpful. Each family member's presence becomes especially important after there has been a loss. You may not feel like the best of company, but your loved ones still need some time with you on special days. And remember, it's all right to have some good times. Laughter and enjoyment are still important parts of living.

Have **Plan A & Plan B**. Plan A is you go to the Thanksgiving, Christmas Day or Christmas Eve dinner with family and friends. If it doesn't feel right, have your plan B ready. Plan B may be a movie you both liked or a photo album to look through or a special place you went to together. Many people find that when they have Plan B in place, just knowing it is there is enough.

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Grief support is available to you and your loved ones from the Zusman Hospice Bereavement Staff.

We offer support through phone calls, individual counseling and group sessions.

Please contact us at  
**614-559-0350.**

Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them.  
It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain.  
Grief is the way out of the pain.  
Grief is our internal feelings and mourning is our external expressions.

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