

Surviving the Holidays

HOLIDAY HELP FOR GRIEVING FAMILIES

By Laura Petherbridge

For those experiencing a loss, the holiday season can be mega stressful and even excruciatingly painful. Whether the loss is profound, like death of a loved one, or from separation, divorce, illness, or other family trauma, such as loss of a home or income, these losses can make the holidays difficult.

Here are a few practical tips for surviving the holidays:

PREPARE. The ambush of emotions can attack at any time; prepare beforehand.

ACCEPT the difficulty of this time of year and your loss. Remind yourself that it's a season and it will pass.

SOCIALIZE. Don't hibernate. Insecure feelings may tempt you to isolate, but force yourself to go out even if it's only for a short time.

LOWER your expectations. Movies and songs paint an unrealistic picture of the holidays.

DON'T ANESTHETIZE the pain with drugs or alcohol. Numbing emotional distress with chemicals creates more depression.

TRIMMING. If old ornaments or trimmings cause too much pain, don't hang them this year. Put them aside for another time.

GET UP AND MOVE. Take care of your physical well-being. Healthy foods will give you strength; fattening and sugar-filled foods can worsen depression. Exercise produces natural stress reducers.

SHOP online if going to the mall is too stressful.

COPING STRATEGY. Have the phone number of your counselor, pastor, church, close friend or hotline already taped to your phone. Make the commitment to call someone if negative thoughts get fierce.

LIGHT. Get some sunshine. Winter can take its toll on your emotions by the loss of sun you experience.

INVITE a friend to see a movie, have dinner or help decorate the house.

SET BOUNDARIES. Precisely explain to your family and friends what you are capable of doing this year, and what you aren't. Don't let others guilt you into taking on more than you can handle.

REACH OTHERS by discovering people who might be alone during the holidays.

If you are coping with loss this season, remember you are not alone. There are many people like you who are walking through this season in grief. Keep in mind that this season will soon be past, and with the New Year, things will get better. ^{GB}

About the Author

Laura Petherbridge is an international speaker and author of, *When "I Do" Becomes "I Don't" – Practical Steps for Healing During Separation and Divorce*. To contact Laura directly visit her website at www.laurapetherbridge.com.

COPING WITH THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the days become very difficult for those who have lost loved ones. It is harder still when the loved one has died close to the holidays. And when a child has died, it seems the memories are the hardest. At this time, emotions are the most tender. Memories of past holidays may come flooding into the mind. Just hearing a Christmas carol in the shopping mall or putting special ornaments on the tree can bring floods of tears. Just feel whatever you feel. Your feelings are normal. Everyone finds their own way to get through this time.

HOW FRIENDS CAN HELP

It's not easy to understand what the survivor feels or what they need. Friends can help by remembering to do little things, like sending a note or giving a phone call. Express your love and support during this difficult time. Remember, it is very important that you mention their loved one by name. Don't be afraid to talk about the loved one. The survivor doesn't want to forget their loved one, and wants to make sure others don't forget either.

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR FAMILY

It is a healthy thing for families to talk about what they want to do with their holidays, and how they can remember their loved one. It seems to help a grieving heart to do something tangible to remember the loved one. Some suggestions include:

- Buy an ornament that brings a memory of the loved one and put it on the tree. Then each year they will add another. This is very healing especially for children.
- Have everyone light a candle and write a message to the loved one. Websites like www.virtualheaven.com make it easy for families to come together in remembrance, no matter where you are in the country.
- Many families sit around the dinner table or Christmas tree and talk about their loved one. Sharing good memories brings healing to everyone. Remember, though, to let all the family members grieve in their own way.