Holidays may be some of the hardest days to face when you are grieving. When a loved one dies, everyone, especially children, feels a loss of control. As much as possible, include the needs of your children in the holiday decision-making process. It’s an opportunity for them to feel more in control and reduce their stress and anxiety. Holiday planning for children can be a healthy escape from the grief, allowing them permission to feel good, laugh and experience positive emotions.

Grief reactions in children are often triggered by important dates and milestones. During this time, you may notice your child asking more questions. It’s important to take the time to answer those questions honestly and openly. The following tips are helpful throughout the year, but may also serve as a reminder to help you make decisions regarding your family’s first holidays coping with the loss of your loved one:

- Children often feel guilty when someone close to them dies because they feel they somehow caused the death. Children often feel guilty when someone close to them dies because they feel they somehow caused the death. Children often feel guilty when someone close to them dies because they feel they somehow caused the death. They need reassurance that the world will go on.
- Children’s grief may show itself only from time to time.
- Children often mix up fantasy and reality. Help them understand that your children may have more energy than normal.
- Children grieve differently than adults. They need you to set expectations too high for yourself or for the day.
- Children often feel that death will take someone else in their family. Assign them a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.
- Children feel genuinely helpful.
- Children need to be contributors of their family. Assign them a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.

Dear Friend,

The holiday season is the most difficult time of year for many who are dealing with grief. It is almost impossible to escape the Thanksgiving preparations, “Happy Holidays” wishes, festive decorations and the pain when someone you love is missing. Some of the typical emotions of grief — sadness, regret and confusion — may resurface or become stronger any time of the season. During this time, it is especially important for you to slow down and be aware of your own needs and limitations.

We hope the material included in this issue of “Healing Through Grief” will help you through this holiday season. Keep in mind your situation is unique and what works for others may not be right for you. Whatever helps you make this time of year more bearable is the right way to cope.

We send you our warmest wishes for a meaningful holiday season that honors the memory of your loved one. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, please call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of Sharp HospiceCare

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Determine which holiday responsibilities you can handle comfortably and let your needs be known to family, friends and relatives. Decide whether you:
• Can talk about your loved one openly
• Can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc., or if you would like someone else to take over some of these tasks
• Will stay home for the holidays, or choose to go to a totally different environment this year

I predict that the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

The most difficult people to be with might be:

My grief triggers will be:

Helpful words that I would like to hear are:

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

In the past, I celebrated holidays by:

This year I want to include the following traditions in my holiday:

One thing that I've always wanted to do during the holidays, but never managed to do, is:

I would like the following people to be with me:

The most difficult words (words I do not consider supportive) might be:

Some things that might help me when I am feeling intense pain are:

Because holidays are times of tradition and ceremony, you may want to create new ceremonies to help bridge the gap between the holidays you shared before your loss and the ones you will now face.

Here are some ideas for honoring your loved one during the holidays:
• Visit the cemetery alone or with others to place flowers, pray, write in a journal or reminisce
• Visit a place that your loved one especially enjoyed
• Plant a special plant, bush or tree
• Donate money to a charity or cause that had special meaning to your loved one
• Give a significant book, piece of jewelry or article of clothing that belonged to your loved one to some special person
• Light a candle during holiday activities
• Reread some special letters and handwritten memories that you shared together
• Gather photographs, mementos and handwritten memories to make a book of memories and experiences you shared

Holidays are times for sharing and celebrating with friends and relatives. Your personal ceremonies can help you to honor and share the memory of your loved one, as you acknowledge the changes and challenges in your life.

Don't be afraid to make a change to your holiday traditions — it really can make things less painful. Consider opening presents at a different time than usual, changing when or where you have dinner, attending a different church, temple or synagogue for your service, letting your children take over decorating or making cookies, or inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, etc.) to your festivities.

Whether it's greeting cards, baking, decorating or a big family dinner, ask these questions before going forward:
• Do I really enjoy doing this?
• Is this a task that can be shared by other family members?
• Would this year's holiday be OK without this particular tradition?

Remember to:
• Take one day at a time.
• Be realistic. Recognize that you need to set limits and do those things that are meaningful to you and your family.
• Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year.

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Reflecting on the holidays and what they mean to you can help you move through them with peace, and even enjoyment. It may help to create a plan for managing your thoughts and expectations during this sensitive time. Consider the following as you develop your own personal holiday plan:

I predict that the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

The most difficult people to be with might be:

My grief triggers will be:

Helpful words that I would like to hear are:

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The most difficult words (words I do not consider supportive) might be:

Some things that might help me when I am feeling intense pain are:

Grief support groups and meeting with others who know what grief is can help during this time of year. Sharp HospiceCare offers free bereavement support groups. For more information or to register, please call us at 1-800-481-9998 or visit sharp.com (search for “bereavement support groups”).