

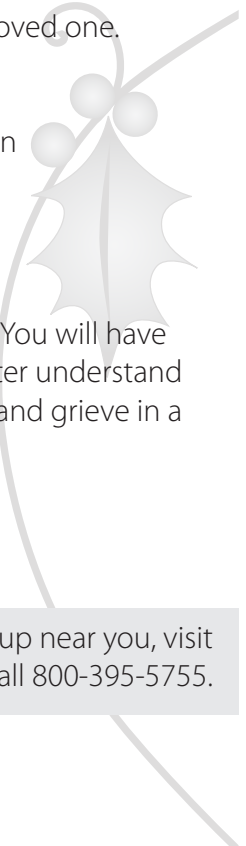
Holidays and Other Special Times

Ideas for Dealing with the Holidays and Other Special Days

Holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other special days can be extremely difficult and are often dreaded by those in grief. Here are some practical suggestions from GriefShare* group leaders and participants on how to make it through these emotionally challenging days.

- Ask yourself questions to help you identify and face the specific feelings and concerns you have about the coming holiday. Questions could include “Which traditions will be different this year?” “Which traditions are important to maintain?” “What plans do I have on that day?” “What do I dread the most about the coming holiday?” “What will I miss the most about not having my loved one here on that day?” “Whom can I ask to pray for me and be my spiritual support on that day?” “How do I plan to take care of myself on that day?”
- Consider having an “escape plan” in place. If you plan to attend a family or group gathering, you could make arrangements with the host/hostess ahead of time to be excused if needed. This plan involves an acknowledgment of the grief process, while also avoiding potentially awkward situations with others.
- Volunteer to help others in need on that special day. For instance, working in a soup kitchen or at the Salvation Army. Your church pastor may have suggestions of other places to volunteer.
- Have a candle-lighting ceremony with your family or close friends to remember lost loved ones. As each person lights a candle, he or she may share something meaningful about the loved one. People could also share a picture, song, poem or a tangible item that was special to the loved one. End with a time of prayer.
- Plan a night of remembrance not only in honor of your lost loved one, but including other friends who have lost a loved one. Provide ornaments or have people bring a special ornament to hang on the tree in remembrance of their lost loved one. Invite people to share a special Christmas memory about their loved one. Include food, music, Scripture and prayer.
- Read a book such as *The Empty Chair: Handling Grief on Holidays and Special Occasions* by Susan Zonnebelt-Smeenge and Robert C. De Vries.

* We encourage you to attend a GriefShare grief recovery support group at a church near you. You will have the opportunity to spend time with others who know the deep pain of grief and who can better understand what you are going through this holiday season. You will also learn how to take steps forward and grieve in a way that is healthy. Make a commitment to visit a group for at least three sessions.



To find a GriefShare group near you, visit www.griefshare.org or call 800-395-5755.