

Survival Tips for Handling the Holidays

When I was a child, the holidays were an elaborate event. My nana prepared an exceptional menu of meats, fish, pastas and pastries that would make angels salivate. Cousins, aunts and uncles, godparents and various other people filled the house with boisterous talking, bellowing laughter and an occasional argument. Nana's girlfriends spoke only Italian, and they smelled a little odd. But their pinch to your cheek or bone-crunching hug only added to the fun ... The holidays were never quite the same without my nana.

For those experiencing a loss, October through December can be excruciatingly painful months. Death, separation, divorce, illness, family trauma, job loss or moving to a new location result in great losses that make the holidays difficult.

Therefore, here are a few practical tips.

- **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 your 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 new (same-sex) 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.

by Laura Petherbridge

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