

## Steps to Coping through the Holidays



### If you don't know where to start

*It's impossible to know exactly how you'll feel and sometimes anticipating the holiday is worse than the day itself.* Take especially good care of your physical health. Focus on getting adequate sleep, find ways to be active and eat healthy. This will help preserve your strength and health at a time when you are vulnerable to illness.

*Approach the holidays with a sense of curiosity rather than expectancy.* It might surprise you how you handle and cope with important days and events. There is no right or wrong way to do this. For instance, you may want to continue with some family traditions or make new ones. You may want to be alone or plan to be around others for support. Remember also, that you are allowed to change plans even if you've made a commitment.

### If it all seems too overwhelming

*Set limits.* The grief you experience on difficult days will zap your energy. For each event or activity decide if it's something you want to do and for what reason. Use your energy to do only the things that are most special and important to you.

*Prevent yourself from overdoing it.* Sometimes we keep busy to stay distracted from the pain. Remember that pain in grief serves a purpose. On holidays and other potentially difficult days we are pushed into the expression of our feelings. Unexpressed emotion can be harmful in our long term journey of grief.

*Recruit help.* Especially for those things that you wish to do, but feel overwhelmed with how to do them or where to start. Be kind to yourself and have someone else fix the Thanksgiving Turkey or plan the family reunion this year.



## If you're worried about facing others or what they might think

*Be prepared with an answer.* Some people won't know what to say or may say something unintentionally rude or offensive. Some people might ask something vague like "how are you?" just to get the conversation started. Feel free to practice a response so you don't have to think on the spot. Depending on your mood you could say "thank you for asking, but I'm having a hard time talking about it right now so can we talk later?" or if you are willing and able to talk you could say "days/times like this are hard and I'm definitely grieving – I miss him/her so much". Give yourself permission to share as much or as little as you like. "I'm doing OK" or "some days are better than others" is completely acceptable if that's all you want to say.



*Don't be afraid to cry in public.* Most people will be understanding. If you need a break, excuse yourself to the bathroom or a private spot and take some deep breaths. Surround yourself with people who are good listeners or attend grief support group meetings.

*Be prepared with an exit strategy.* Avoid relying on someone else for a ride if you feel you might want to leave before them. Make a commitment for a certain time after the event starts so you can have a reason to leave if you need to, even if the commitment is to go home and be alone (they don't have to know what your plans are). You can tell them "I'm sorry to cut this short, but I have another place to be right now – I'll be in touch later".

## Facing the years ahead

*What you choose to do the first year, you don't have to do the next.* You can experiment with new family rituals. Plant a tree, light a candle, set an empty plate at the table, give to a charity, reminisce with the picture album, or create commemorative decorations. There are so many ways to incorporate your loved one and acknowledge their life on such a special day. Most people are thinking about the person anyway and you can honor him/her in a positive way.



**You are not alone**

Call us 231.728.3442 or 800.497.9559 to RSVP for one of our Grief Support Groups

Email: [info@HarborHospiceMI.org](mailto:info@HarborHospiceMI.org) or visit [HarborHospiceMI.org](http://HarborHospiceMI.org)