

Handling Special Occasions

Special occasions are often difficult times for those who grieve. The realization that things will be different now that a loved one is gone evokes feelings of sadness and loneliness and a sense that it isn't right to celebrate in their absence.

The following are some suggestions for helping you cope with these times:

Mark on your calendar all special occasions that occur during the year. These may include traditional holidays as well as birthdays, anniversaries (including the one-year anniversary of your loved ones death) summer vacations, family reunion times and so on.

Anticipate each occasion by creating a plan to help anchor yourself. Decide what you will do and with whom you will celebrate or commemorate that day. Attempt to do what is meaningful for you rather than acting out a habit or obligation. Even staying home and doing nothing is okay, as long as you plan it ahead.

Acknowledge the activities that cause you the most discomfort. Make some changes accordingly, at least for this year. For example, you might decide to "runaway" to a completely different setting for the holidays rather than stay at home or forego the usual holiday rituals and activities.

Use simple rituals to remember your loved ones. For example, burn a candle, go to the cemetery, place a rose on your table, make your loved one favorite dessert, or do something they would have enjoyed.

Do something for others. Some examples include volunteering at the local food bank, donating to a meaningful charity or inviting a guest who would otherwise be alone to share a holiday meal.

Keep a manageable pace. Be sure to rest or nap as needed to recharge. Ask others for assistance and divide up the workload. You don't have to do it alone.

Be accepting of whatever mood you are in. You don't have to feel or act happy just because it's a special day. If you are having a day that isn't so bad and you feel like doing something, do it! Don't be afraid of what someone else will think. Remember that laughter is every bit as important as tears.



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