



Family Toolkit

Navigating Grief During the Holidays

Reassurance

Together as a family you CAN navigate this challenging time. The first holiday season following a loss can feel overwhelming and may look different than years in the past. Children may need frequent reminders that they are safe and loved, and that whatever feelings they are having this year are okay.

Feeling excited about gifts does not mean that they don't miss their person. Similarly, not feeling excited about celebrations this year is normal.

Collaboration (Extended Network)

Work together with people in your circle who can help. Overwhelmed by decorating because your partner used to do it? Let a family friend take it on. Your kids want to go to a holiday party but you don't? Who else would they enjoy going with?

Consider who could be a safe person when you need to talk, cry, or remember your person. Schedule times to check in or come up with a code word that you can share so they know when you're having a hard day.

Collaboration (Your Family)

Come up with a plan as a family for navigating this season. You might be stressed about fitting in certain traditions for your kids only to find out that something else feels more important to them anyway. What traditions are people looking forward to? What can you let go of for this year?

Work together to plan out days, activities, and people to see. Be sure to build in times for quiet at home to rest and recharge.

Deferral

Let this holiday season be JUST this holiday season. Say “not this year” to parties, gift exchanges, meals, or other traditions that feel overwhelming or that you’re not looking forward to.

Take the pressure off yourself to do everything you did prior to the loss and know that the decisions that you make for this year can be revisited next holiday season when you are at a different place in your grief journey.

Expectations

Setting this expectation ahead of time can be helpful, the first holiday season following a loss will feel different. Talk to your kids about what specifically might be different and explore (without judging) how each person feels about those changes. Be clear, too, with people in your extended circle. You might not make it to all the holiday events that you used to, or you might not have the same budget for gift giving.

Know that it's okay to set boundaries for yourself and your children – communicate clearly (or ask a trusted friend to do so on your behalf) and be firm when needed about what fits on your plate this season.

Memorializing

Together as a family you can create new traditions and ways to remember your person. Setting a place for them at the table, making their favorite holiday recipe, lighting a special candle, listening to their favorite holiday songs, or using their picture to create a beautiful decoration are all meaningful ways to celebrate your person’s memory during the holidays.

Working together with your kids to find ways to memorialize your person can be healing for everyone and can help your children learn about healthy grieving.

know that we are with you