

# Helping Children Through a Challenging Time of the Year

CHILDREN VIEW THE HOLIDAYS differently from adults. A grieving adult might react by cutting back on holiday celebrations. Grieving kids, however, are apt to focus on the joy and hope linked to the family's holiday traditions. Many kids still want the things they are used to at the holidays. They still look forward to the decorations, the parties, and the gifts.

Of course, children still grieve. But they may express grief differently depending on their age. A teen may sulk or withdraw, while a young child may act out.

With the loss of a family member, some holiday traditions that a child knows have to change or end. Perhaps Thanksgiving dinner was always at Grandpa's. Or Abuelita and the kids made tamales together. Or Mom's special pecan pie was the Christmas Eve treat everyone waited for. Therefore, grieving families must create new traditions. This is a vital life lesson — for children old and young as well as adults: Loss means change, not just emptiness.

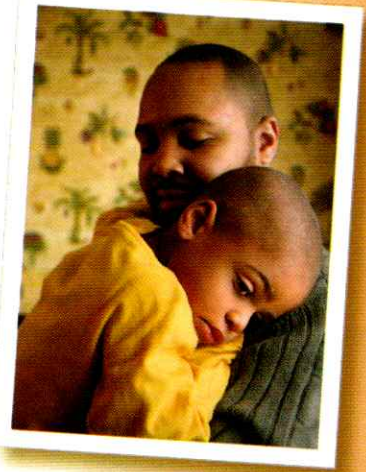
**Honor your loved one.** — Before each holiday arrives, the family, kids included, however young, should get together. Decide how your loved one will be remembered. There are many ways. Each person, even the youngest,

might recall cherished memories. The family might donate to a cause that meant a lot to your loved one. Everyone may gather for a candle ceremony.

**Open communication.** — No matter what the age of your child or children, maintain the lines of communication. Remember to make it age-appropriate. Your teen likely understands more than you think; your young child may not be able to absorb as much as you think.

Many kids from age 7 or 8 up find help from a bereavement group designed for their age. They're with others at their developmental level going through similar feelings and thoughts. This can be especially useful because the rest of their peers will be focused on fun and joy. A support group provides them with a place beyond the family where they can be heard and listen to others.

The holiday season is usually a challenging time for families that are grieving. It's also a time that can be a meaningful and creative part of the process, providing opportunities to honor the memory of your loved one. ■



## 11 Things You Can Do to Handle the Holiday Stress

THE END-OF-YEAR holidays can be stressful even in the happiest times. Family events, out-of-town visitors, office parties, church functions, vacations. End-of-year deadlines at work. And of course there's shopping.

Now add the stress of losing a loved one. You're wishing it was 2017 and could all be over.

First, realize this feeling is normal — not great, but normal. Here are 11 steps to help get you through the holidays. Indeed, they're good for any holiday season, but they are all the more important when grieving.



- 1. Be realistic.** — Don't try for perfect. Accept that this year can't be perfect.
- 2. Think simple.** — Avoid committing to too much, which, this year, means not much.

- 3. Exercise.** — Stick by set routines.
- 4. Eat and drink right.** — Don't pile on the sugar, fat, alcohol and caffeine. Any or all of them are easy to overdo during the holiday season, and will increase stress.

- 5. Say "Yes."** — If friends offer to help, accept. Let yourself ask for help.
- 6. Say "No."** — Be polite and show your appreciation. Let's repeat: Avoid committing to too much, which, this year, means not much.

- 7. Start new holiday traditions.** — Young kids are frequently good at coming up with ideas.
- 8. Give.** — Volunteer. Donate to charity. Help those in need.
- 9. Delve into the spiritual side of the holidays.** — Popular culture tends to focus on the commercial and superficial. But these are observances with deep, serious meanings and origins. Explore that. How do they touch you, your family, all of us?
- 10. Rest.** — Get enough sleep. Give yourself short, frequent breaks to relax. Meditate. Allow yourself solitary, quiet times.
- 11. Treat yourself well.** — See a movie. Get a massage. Visit someplace special. Dine with friends and talk about old times. Enjoy your loved one's memory. You will always have that. ■

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