

COPING WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Pat Hoffman

Coping with change due to death or other life transitions can make holidays challenging. What to do? How to get through the holidays when every activity reminds you of the person who is not there?

Keep holiday plans simple. If you've had a recent loss or change, dealing with your mourning is going to take time and energy. Plan for it and don't crowd it.

Acknowledge the one who is not there. If you have a holiday gathering, speak about the person who is not there. ("Dad would have loved this dinner." "It feels strange to be celebrating without Mom." "I miss Suzy this year.")

Remember. Consider including time for those who gather to remember the deceased. ("We always went to Grandma's for Thanksgiving." "Remember how Betty insisted on sending those family letters. She really kept us all informed about the family doings.")

Accept new roles. Accept the new roles that members of the family now must assume and the different ways that things now will be done. The person who has died or is no longer present may have always carved the turkey, or sent out the invitations, or decorated the house. The loved one's absence means that the roles that person carried need to be carried by others, or dropped. This can be quite an adjustment.

Reinvest in life. As you approach the holiday, think about someone new you would like to include in your gatherings or activities or try out some new holiday related experience that interests you or gives new meaning to the holiday.

May your holidays be simply rich with meaning.

Pat Hoffman is a retired hospice Chaplain and a Nationally Certified Bereavement Facilitator. Pat was previously the Chaplain at AIDS Care in Ventura County. She is the author of several books including AIDS and the Sleeping Church, published in 1995.