

How to Cope on Celebratory and Other Special Days

(adapted from the Dougy Center)

As with grief generally, what is helpful during celebratory days and other special days is unique to each family. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO COPE DURING THESE DAYS.

- **Accept your limitations.** You may not be able to or want to do what you've done in previous years. Lower expectations of yourself and your family, to allow yourselves time and space to grieve.
- **Plan ahead where possible.** Decide what you can and cannot do, and let your family know ahead of time so that they can adjust their expectations.
- **Prioritize what is important.** Make a list of the things you normally do during special and celebratory days (sending cards, cooking, baking, decorating, dancing, singing, dressing up, prayer, chanting, reading stories) then mark the ones that are most important and place question marks next to the rest.
- **Respect everyone's individual feelings and wishes for these days.** Just as grief is different for each person, so are the wishes and hopes for special days for each family member, including the children.
- **Understand that it's normal for your child/teen to want to commemorate special days as they did before the death.** Even as they grieve, children and teens need to feel okay having fun and enjoying traditions from before the death.
- **Emotionally prepare yourself for holiday well-wishers.** You may receive cards addressed to the whole family, lots of food may arrive, you may have people who want to visit, there can be a lot of preaching or prayer, and cheerful welcoming from strangers who are unaware of the pain you feel inside. Brace yourself and know that others wish you well and that their greetings are not intended to be hurtful reminders.
- **Be informed before attending events.** Knowing what to expect at events will help you prepare emotionally. Prep the children for possible questions by some people or awkward avoidance by others.
- **Ask for help if you need it.** Often friends and family want to help but don't know how. People enjoy supporting in concrete ways, such as cleaning, cooking, baking, shopping, running errands, or carpooling for kid's activities.
- **Make time for resting.** Preparing for celebratory days, birthdays, and other special days, is often physically and emotionally exhausting, which is compounded when you are grieving. A short nap, walk around the neighbourhood, or other quiet activity can help to regain some energy.
- **Remember to eat well and drink water.** Rich foods and beverages are often abundantly available during times of traditional celebrations, and it can be tempting to overindulge. Staying nourished and hydrated helps with physical and emotional energy.
- **Acknowledge the life of the person who died.** Often parents do not mention the person who died to protect children and teens from difficult feelings. It can be emotionally and spiritually healthier to speak of the person who died, which also gives permission for children and others to talk and remember them.
- **Consider new traditions.** The special annual celebrations, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and other significant days can never be exactly the same as before the person died. Allowing yourself and your children to explore new ways to commemorate and create new traditions can be an important part of the healing process.



Getting Through Celebratory and Other Special Days

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME WAYS THAT PARENTS, CHILDREN AND TEENS CAN TAKE TIME TO REMEMBER THE PERSON WHO DIED:

- **Write a card or letter to the person who died.** Although a one-sided conversation or writing to the person, allows an opportunity to express thoughts and feelings that might otherwise stay bottled inside.
- **Make a memory chain.** On strips of decorative paper, have children and other family members write special memories or advice they received from the person who died. Loop the strips of paper together to make a chain and hang as part of the holiday decorating.
- **Share a meal of the person's favourite foods or bake their favourite celebration treat.** Cooking foods that the person loved can help children and family members to recall and share memories of the person.
- **Include a special candle for the person who died as part of the holiday decorations.** You may want to light the candle as a symbol of the person's continued presence.
- **Hang a special decoration in memory of the person.**
- **Buy a gift that the person would have liked and donate it for a family in need.**
- **Decorate the gravesite.** Invite children/teens, extended family, and friends to help you decorate the gravesite or memorial location. This can be a fun way to bring people together to take some time out and focus on remembering the person who died.
- **Create a small area in the home for memorabilia of the person.** Gather photos, stuffed animals, cards, food, and any other items that remind each family member of the person who died.
- **Observe a moment of silence or make a toast to the person before the celebratory meal.** This can be a chance for everyone to acknowledge the person together. Family members may want to share memories or something they are thankful for in having had the person in their life.
- **Participate in a commemoration that's specific to person's culture.** This could include smearing windows with ash, fasting, cutting or shaving your hair, hanging a white cloth over a doorway, creating sugar skulls, collecting marigolds, making special cookies, etc.



We at Lighthouse wish your family peace and hope during your celebratory and other special family days.