



# Re-Creating HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

## Ideas for Families Facing Very Different Holidays

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Holidays can be stressful, even during the best of times. For families grieving a loved one, significant dates hold even more emotional intensity and complexity. Reminders of the season — lights, music, decorations, and gift-giving — may seem out of sync with internal feelings or may trigger painful memories for families facing a very different holiday.

The following are a few ideas for the holiday season. We encourage you to sift through them. Embrace and try on those that give you strength. Ignore the others. Consider your own ideas to manage stress and create moments of meaning for you:

### 1. Clarify *priorities*, and reduce stress.

- ★ May you give yourself permission to do things very differently. And, may you give yourself permission to continue traditions that bring you comfort and peace. Pause and consider what you truly want and need to do. Do you really want to clean? Host? Attend an event? If so, do so with bells and whistles. If you are dreading something, listen to yourself.
- ★ Strive to eliminate unnecessary pressures on yourself and others.

- ★ Resist overextending or overcommitting. Be realistic to avoid feeling that you have failed or let someone down. Shift the focus to things that are really important to you and your family.
- ★ Inventory your holiday traditions. What are your favorite family traditions? Is it important to carry them on this year, or is this a good time to begin some new ones?
- ★ Reevaluate ways of continuing traditions you find meaningful in ways that honor your loss, without adding stress or pain. Attempt to merge traditions in blended or newly formed families.

### 2. Take care of *you*.

- ★ May you let go of pleasing everyone else and do some things that are especially meaningful to YOU.
- ★ Think about blatant self-care. What could bring you even the tiniest bit of comfort, peace, or beauty? A daily bath? A walk with a dear friend? Reading silly books or magazines? A precious flower? Polishing your toenails? Listening to your favorite music? Visiting a museum, library, café, or other special place?
- ★ Don't forget the basics: eat well, drink lots of water, sleep, exercise, and spend time with supportive others.





★ Find a creative outlet for all the feelings. Write, draw, sew, knit, take photos, cook, dance, sing, etc.

★ Take time to be with others, and give yourself permission to spend time alone. Carve out space to grieve and honor the changes — time to sift through what once was, what may be, and to allow space for this pause in between past and future.

### 3. Create space to honor your grief and your pain.

★ Do whatever helps with this: talk, cry, write, look at photos, play music, visit special places.

★ Remember it is OK to cry AND it is OK not to cry.

★ Talk with others about your loved one and what is most difficult for you right now. Others may not bring up memories believing that they are protecting you. If you desire, break the silence.

★ Allow yourself to lean on others. It is a gift to get to support someone. Reach out and let someone know you would appreciate time or connection with them.

### 4. Recognize that our greatest joy may come in doing something for someone else.

★ Great pleasure can come from helping others.

★ If you have the energy, sort out old clothes and household items and donate them to a shelter, group home, or thrift store. Think about making cookies

for someone who has been especially supportive to you. Write a note to someone who has been on your mind and loves mail. Donate a can of food to a food bank.

### 5. Be intentional and mindful of your children's needs.

★ Bring your children into the planning of the holiday and make it positive for them.

★ Include them in activities that acknowledge the loss and honor your loved one.

★ Listen to them, talk to them, and be with them.

★ When asked directly, kids often have clear ideas about how they wish to acknowledge people they care about who are not present during the holidays, such as lighting a candle, cooking a special dish, or saying their loved one's name.

Ideas compiled from Tamarack Grief Resource Center staff and Johnson, WY (1991). *The Holidays: A mixture of love and pain*. Thanatos, p. 28-29.

#### About the Author

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