Five Do's for Coping with Grief During the Holidays

- 1. Do pace yourself.
 - a. Give yourself time to rest. Grieving is physically exhausting...allow for some down time.
 - b. Re-examine your priorities and decide what you really have the energy for. Is baking cookies joyful for you? If not, let it go for this year.
- 2. Do recognize your loved one's presence in your celebrations.
 - a. Create an outward symbol of their presence in your heart: light a candle for them on the dining table, hang their stocking in remembrance.
 - b. Remember some of the good times from years past.
- 3. Do allow yourself to express your feelings.
 - a. Meet with a family member or friend to share your feelings around your loss.
 - b. For some people journaling is a comfortable way to express their feelings. Or try writing a letter to the loved one whom you've lost.
- 4. Do something for yourself or for another
 - a. For some, accepting the importance of self-care is a necessary step for this season. Allow yourself time off, see a movie or get a massage.
 - b. For others, doing something for another feels like the right way to share and honor the love that you hold for your lost loved one. Visit a nursing home, volunteer at a food pantry or bake cookies for your neighbors.
- 5. Do accept that this holiday is different than previous years.
 - a. The first few holidays without a loved one can be especially hard. Allow change to occur even as you love and remember.
 - b. Remind yourself that, in fact, every year is different. Reflect back on how your traditions have changed through your life.

You will get through the holidays and you will not always feel as you do this year!

Visit my "Grief" pages at http://www.ashleydavisbush.com/grief/ for more information and exercises for coping with grief during all the stages of your grieving process.

Five Don'ts for Coping with Grief During the Holidays

- 1. Don't hide your feelings.
 - a. Honor your relationship with your loved one. Your feelings reflect this relationship and hiding them can make the loss feel even greater.
 - Find ways to express your feelings that are comfortable for you.
 Experiment with writing, quiet conversation, singing, painting or sculpture.
- 2. Don't be afraid to reminisce.
 - a. Talking about good times past, sharing memories is one of the best ways to honor your loved one's presence in your life even as you move on physically without them.
 - b. Be proactive. Others around you need to reminisce too: "I miss Mom, remember how she used to....."
- 3. Don't be afraid to cry.
 - a. If you are worried about crying, it will be difficult for you to reminisce or express your feelings. If you are grieving, crying is expected of you. It is healthy and natural.
 - b. If you are worried that your crying will upset others, it can be helpful when you get together to state simply, "I'm crying a lot lately; if I cry today don't worry, I'm okay."
- 4. Don't try to recreate the past.
 - a. Allow change to happen. Every year is different. Hold on to the traditions that feel right and be okay with letting others go.
 - b. Open yourself to completely new traditions. Think outside the box, such as ordering take out Chinese or going out to a movie on Christmas day.
- 5. Don't feel guilty about experiencing some joy or having fun.
 - a. Having fun honors your love. If fun happens, let it.
 - b. Even while grieving, it's okay to open yourself to small glimmers of joy and pleasure: the laughter of children, a favorite aroma.

Remember that anticipation is often worse than the actual event. Breathe deep.

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