



Holiday Suggestions for Grieving Children and Families

On holidays and special days like birthdays, the absence of the person who died can be especially painful. Children participating in bereavement support groups have made the following suggestions to help cope with those difficult feelings:

- Keep something that belonged to the person who died near you
- Look at pictures and remember the good times
- Light a candle to remember the person
- Hug your family and/or ask for hugs
- Make an ornament or decoration for the person who died, or one that reminds you of that person
- Remember the person who died by listening to music they liked or eating their favorite food
- Take something to the grave, like a card or a candle
- Talk about memories with your relatives
- Talk to people about your feelings and about the person who died
- Buy a present in memory of the person who died and give it to someone less fortunate
- Talk to the person in your mind or out loud
- Do activities or play games that the person liked to do, or that you liked to do with them, like snowball fights or building snow forts
- If you take a special holiday family photo, include something in the photo (such as a special stuffed animal) to represent the person who died
- Visit the places you used to go together
- It's okay to have fun

Tips for Coping During the Holidays

The holidays can be an especially difficult time for children coping with the death of someone important to them. The Kentucky Center for Grieving Children and Families suggests several ways to help these children through the holidays.

After a death:

- Share photos and holiday memories of the person who died. Children want to know you miss them, too.
- Make an ornament to hang on the tree that reminds the child of the person who died.
- Decorate a candle and light it at meal time in memory of the person.
- Help the child decorate a wreath with pictures and items that were loved by the person who died and place the wreath at the grave.
- Help the child make a donation to a charity in memory of the person who died.
- Listen to the person's favorite holiday music.
- Hang a picture of your important person on the tree.
- Help the child with a blessing at meal time that mentions the person who died.
- Encourage the child to draw pictures and create gifts inspired by their memories of the person to give to other family members.
- Consider enrolling the children in bereavement support groups at Ele's Place.

Holiday Rituals

Many families have found healing during the holidays by creating personal ceremonies or rituals that help them to remember their important person. Children often find comfort through creating personal ceremonies

that give them concrete ways to remember the person. Some suggestions for the holiday season include:

- Create a memory book about your person who died. You can include photos, pictures drawn by children, special memorabilia, and stories.
- Start a new tradition - for example, a storytelling time to reminisce about your person who died. Children may enjoy hearing stories about the childhood years of a parent or grandparent.
- Decorate an ornament or candle in memory of your person.
- Invite family and friends to send you letters and stories.
- Light candles in honor of the deceased at the holiday table or at a special place in your home.
- Write letters to the person who died and place these in a special basket or perhaps in a holiday stocking. Children may want to write about events that were important to them during the past year. The letters may be burned to protect privacy.
- Prepare a favorite recipe or meal in memory of the person.
- Make or buy a gift in memory of your important person to donate to a charity that is important to your family.

Holiday Activities for Grieving Young People

Adapted from an article by Louise Aldrich in the journal *Thanatos*

The following activity ideas can be used to help children and teens cope with the loss of a family member during a time of family traditions and festivities. Acknowledging the loss, and the changes that have happened, can help family members cope with their feelings and grief and embrace the joys of the season more fully.

- Make a paper chain out of colored construction paper, and invite all family members to write a memory (or draw a picture of a memory) of the person who died on each link of the chain
- As a family, decorate a box with wrapping paper and ribbon, wrapping the top separately so it can be removed. Talk together

about how gifts can be not just physical objects that are given, but can also be things that are felt or learned. For example, helping someone, teaching them a skill, listening when they have something to say, are all gifts. Think about what kinds of “gifts” were given by the person who died, and encourage family members to write or draw how that person was a gift to them. These messages can be put in the box, and can be read together during the holiday.

- Hang a stocking for the person who died, and ask each family member to share a good quality of that person.
- Include the person who died in a toast at the dinner table, or in a prayer or blessing.
- Create a memory table and invite family members to contribute something that reminds them of the person who died.
- As a family, decide on a gift that can be given to a person or organization in memory of the person who died. This could be a charitable donation or a gift of time or services that will help others.

To learn more about our grief support groups and programs, contact The Kentucky Center for Grieving Children and Families at www.kcgcf.org; kychildrengrieve@gmail.com; or call 859-813-2759.