

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS



For many people, this is a season of celebrations. However, the holidays are often a difficult time for those who are coping with grief due to a death or serious injury. At this time of year memories of past holidays can be overwhelming, what may have been a joyful time in the past may now seem meaningless.

Many bereaved and injured people face this season with apprehension, often in fear of their emotional reactions to what are supposed to be happy, memorable moments. A common question asked by those mourning a loved one or struggling to make sense of other losses is, "How can I get through the holidays?"

There is no single answer of what we should or should not do, but it is important that we consider what activities are comfortable for you to participate in during the holidays. When everyone else appears so happy and cheerful, it is easy to feel alone after a loss. Please know that you aren't the only one who feels this way.

Coping Tips

Please consider some of the suggestions below that may help you cope with the holiday season:

- Plan ahead for the approaching holidays. Accept that this might be a difficult time for you. The additional stress this season brings may impact you emotionally, financially, physically and spiritually. These are normal reactions. Be prepared for rushes of emotions that may occur and the possibility that sights and sounds could trigger memories and flashbacks.
- Recognize that the holidays might not be the same as they were in the past. Expecting everything to seem the same might lead to disappointment. Modify or make new traditions as it feels right. But also remember the holidays may affect other family members. Talk to others as you make plans and share your feelings. Respect other's choices and needs, including children's, and compromise if necessary.
- Go on a trip if you feel you will be devastated by staying home. But remember that November and December holidays are celebrated all over the world and you may be faced with the same types of images no matter where you go.
- Relive the happy memories. Pick three special memories of holidays past with your loved one. Think of them often - and celebrate them. If you have lost someone find a way to honor them through new holiday traditions.
- Direct moments of uncomfortable silence. Because family and friends love you, they will think they are doing you a favor by not mentioning your loved one or the crash. Have a conversation with your loved ones and let them know if you do or don't want to talk about the crash or a loved one who was killed.
- Don't overwhelm or over commit yourself. Give yourself a reprieve. Accept a few invitations to be with close family or friends. Choose the ones that sound most appealing at the time and decline the ones that feel more like an obligation. Take time for yourself and take care of yourself. Take it slow and easy, one step at a time.
- Be careful not to isolate yourself. It is all right to take time for yourself, but try not to cut yourself off from the support of family and friends.
- Talk about your feelings. Let people know if you are having a tough day.
- Consider holding or attending a memorial service or candlelight vigil. You can make it as small or large as you want. For a large gathering you might host people at a special location, have food prepared, have favorite music playing, poems read and even have someone speak. At a friends and family gathering you could take a few minutes of time to share your favorite stories with others and make a toast or light a candle in honor and remembrance.

If you want to talk with someone about coping during the holidays or for any reason, please call our 24-Hour Victim Help Line at 1-877-MADD-HELP (877-623-3435) or visit madd.org to chat online.