

HOLIDAY SURVIVORSHIP SKILLS

The holidays are a traditional time of joy and laughter, sparkle and glitter, sharing and gift-giving, But for people who are grieving, the holidays may seem inappropriate, affronting, and painful. The holidays may be a time of mixed emotions, feelings of being overwhelmed with multiple demands, and the pain of loves lost. As the holidays approach, think about how you take care of yourself during this vulnerable time.

Helpful Hints:

1. Acknowledge Grief Work as Real Work

Adjustment to the death or dying of someone close to you does not simply come with time. The work of grief demands that you deal with all the feelings that loss engenders. This work takes psychic and physical energy that can leave you unable to deal with the extra demands of the holiday season.

2. Set Limits

Tell your family, friends, and yourself now – and continue to remind them – that you are on a *stress reduction diet* this holiday season. You will *not* be over-doing, over-shopping, over-cooking, over-complying, or over-worrying this year. Put a sign on your bathroom mirror or refrigerator to remind yourself or others.

3. Change *Shoulds* to *Wants*

Be aware of your own statements to yourself. Are you saying “I *should* do this or that?” Decide which of your “shoulds” you really “want” to do and make those your priorities. Remember: You should not “should” yourself; there are enough other people doing that already.

4. Strive for a Balanced Lifestyle

With all the parties and demands of the holidays, it is difficult for anyone to get enough rest and exercise. It is easy to overindulge.

Set Exercise as a Priority – It is an antidote to depression.

Learn Relaxation Techniques – They are an antidote to stress.

Don't Overdo the Egnog – Alcohol is an antidote for nothing.

5. Tell Others Clearly What You Want and Need for the Holidays

Do not be shy or embarrassed to let others know what you want from them in terms of emotional support, help, or sharing. Mind-reading of your or others' needs is best left up to fortune tellers. Unknown expectations generally go unfulfilled and lead to disappointment and bad feelings.

6. Be Generous to Yourself

The holidays are a time of real and symbolic gift-giving. What are you giving yourself this season? When the new year rolls in, what will be your answer to the question, “What supportive and caring thing did I do for myself this holiday season?”

7. Celebrate Life

It seems like impossibility for someone in grief to find joy and peace at any time, but especially during the season for joy and peace. This is your challenge. Life is worth living only to the extent that we make it so. Survivorship means more than merely surviving; it means fully living. Search for the living path for you and start now!

Prepared by Ellen S. Zinner, PhD and based on materials developed in part by Sally Featherstone, RN.