

## Coping with Grief at Christmas



Christmas is a time of mixed feelings for those who are missing someone they love. As we gather with family and friends, the absence of a loved one may be felt even more intensely. Whether it's a parent or partner who has left the family or a loved one who has died, you may be left feeling out of step with the jolliness of the tinsel and carols.

It is especially important at this time to take care of yourself and those around you who have also experienced significant loss or change. While some people keep busy to distract themselves, others prefer to withdraw to their memories and reflections; there is no right or wrong way to act or feel.

### It's hard to predict how you'll be feeling, so put some safeguards into place.

- Don't make any big decisions over Christmas time. You will probably be feeling enough stress and distraction, and there is no need to add to it. If possible, wait until the New Year.
- Make plans to be around people who you trust and who understand that you might not be feeling very "jolly". Let them know that you may actually prefer to be alone sometimes, and they should not be offended if this is the case.
- Give yourself some time to think about the person you are missing. Listen to music, look at pictures, cry if you feel you want or need to. This may mean you are less likely to be overwhelmed or caught off guard by Christmas 'triggers'.
- If a family has been split through divorce or separation, Christmas day may become a logistic struggle for children who now have two places to be. Make this easier for them by including them in plans ahead of time and making the transition as smooth as possible, and do your best to avoid competition over time spent with children or size and expense of gifts.

### Here are some things that might help you manage your grief feelings over Christmas.

- Do something to remember the person you are missing...
  - Play their favourite music
  - Go to a place they loved or do something you used to do together
  - Write them a Christmas card
  - Share memories and stories with others who loved them too
  - If children are missing the person too, involve them and find out how they would like to remember their loved one.
- Give yourself permission to do less. People will understand if you do not get the Christmas letter out, if you do not bake cookies for everyone or if you miss a few parties. The most important thing is taking care of yourself and those close to you.
- Accept help. If you feel as though you are not coping well, reach out to people you trust and say yes to offers of support or company.
- Let yourself have fun. If you are feeling happy, go with it – it does not mean that you are forgetting or forsaking the person who is not there.

## New Year

With Christmas comes New Year, a milestone which prompts reflection upon the past and plans for the future. Memories may bring both pain and happiness, while thoughts of the future may bring reminders of lost dreams as well as hope. Be gentle with yourself at this time, too.

