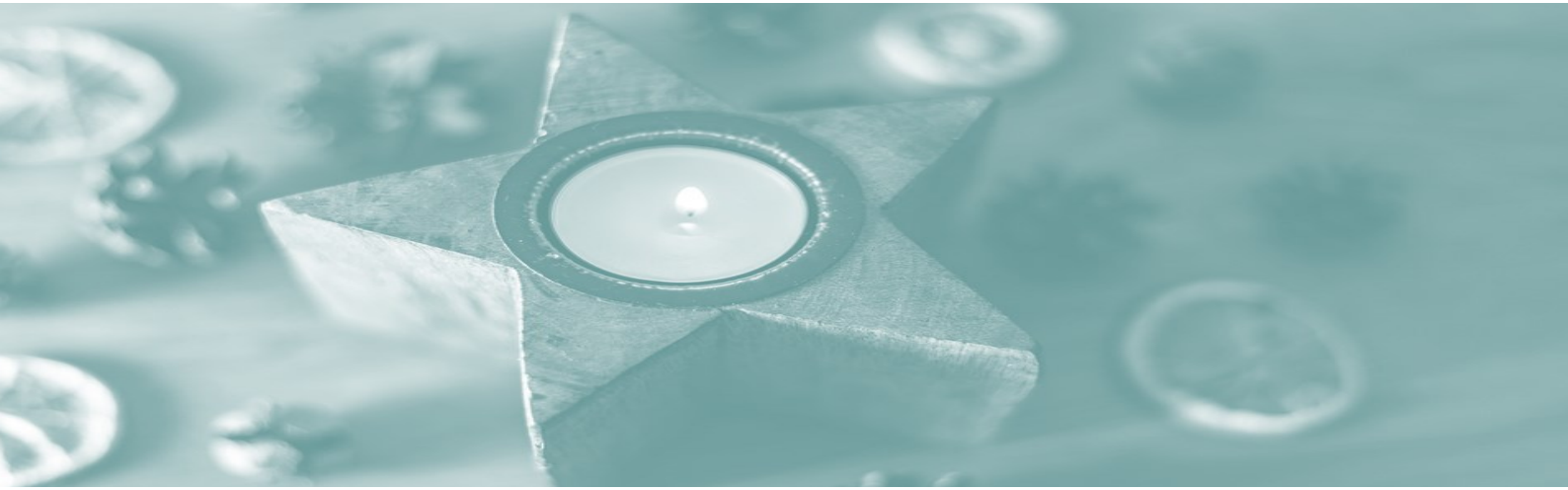




COPING WITH THE FESTIVE SEASON



About Being Strong

Many people are convinced that being strong and brave means trying to think and talk about 'something else'.

But we know that being strong and brave means thinking and talking about your lost love one, or loved ones, until your grief begins to be bearable.

That is strength. That is courage. And only thus can 'being strong and brave' help you to heal.

Sascha, "The Sorrow and the Light"



HOLIDAY REFLECTION

Since we cannot ignore it or make it go away, we can deal with the situation by making specific plans with our families.

We can assess priorities. We can make changes. We can decide what traditions to uphold and which to set aside this year. We can choose to openly acknowledge our grief for our children, siblings and grandchildren.

We can think about some very special gifts. To ourselves we can grant the gift of acceptance by realising that our grief is a necessary healing process.

To our families, we can extend the gift of empathy by remembering that they, too, hurt. To our missing loved ones, we can bestow the gift of homage by determining to work through grief so that we may live life to the fullest.

Candy McLaughlin
TCF Minneapolis, MN, USA

**Please know that Compassionate Friends is still here for you over the festive season.
Our 24 hour phone line is still OPEN, if you need to talk to someone.
Please call 03 9888 4944 or 1300 064 068**

COPING WITH THE FESTIVE SEASON

There is no right or wrong way to cope with the festive season, especially if this is the first without your beloved child. We have compiled a list of ideas, gleaned from many sources. Hints that other grieving parents have found help get them through the festive season. If there is a suggestion that you feel is right for you and your family hold on to it and let the others go, maybe next year you might feel like trying some other ideas.

PREPARATION

- * Know that as a grieving person, you have physical and emotional limitations. Evaluate priorities and decide what you want to do and what you are capable of doing .
- * You and your family come first, what is most comfortable for all of you is what should be done. Let these needs be known to family, friends and relatives.
- * Discuss with your family how they feel and what they would like to do. Let them decorate the tree, make the cookies, wrap the presents etc.

Ways to Include Your Loved One's Life and Memories

- * Take time, maybe before the festive dinner, to ask everyone to have a moment of silence to think about your loved one, or loved ones. Ask them if they would like to share their thoughts.
- * Invite everyone to write down a special thought about your child, sibling or grandchild. This could be a special gift for you and your family to revive those special memories.
- * Burn a candle on the festive day in memory of your child.
- * Buy a gift your loved one/s would have enjoyed and donate it to charity to brighten another's day, or make a donation in your loved one's name to their favourite charity.
- * Buy a helium balloon and get the family to write messages to tie to it and together release it.
- * Ask everyone to bring photographs of 'Festive Seasons Past'. Photo's of you as a child or perhaps your parents. You might find that the sharing of these photos makes it easier and leads naturally into the sharing of memories of your loved one/s as well as other family members who are absent (grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.)

Changes You Could Make

- * Don't feel you should send out festive cards; I'm sure your friends will understand.
- * Change the time of your festive meal, maybe dinner instead.
- * Attend a different Church or different service.
- * Do something for someone else. Focusing on others (elderly neighbour, someone with no relatives nearby) for part of the holidays will give you a respite from your pain.

Some Things to Watch For

- * Don't pretend you do not hurt.
- * Don't make changes in everything.
- * Don't forget that the festive season often magnifies feelings of loss of a loved one. Experiencing the sadness that comes is important and natural. To block out such feelings is unhealthy. Keep the positive memory of your loved one/s alive.
- * Don't give yourself the additional burden of worrying about crying. Your tears shouldn't ruin the day for other family members, but will provide them with the same freedom. Remember your crying can't MAKE others cry, they cry because they too are affected by the death of your child or their brother or sister or grandchild.
- * You might not want to change anything; you may want to keep busy, not have time to think, hold back the pain. Don't get so busy that you will not have time to think about your loved one/s, it will catch up with you and possibly hit you harder than if you had allowed yourself the freedom to hurt, to yearn, to wonder what might have been, to truly miss them and be allowed to say so.

*This list was compiled from many articles from many TCF chapters. The hints were found to be similar in many and some were found in just one; however, the one important thing that was stated in ALL of them was—realise that no matter what we do, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries will come and that the anticipation and lead up is nearly always worse than the actual day. How true that is for me; is it the same for you? **Gayle Cameron, TCF Victoria, Aust.***