

## What Should Family and Friends Know About Helping You Through the Holidays

After a loss, and particularly after the death of a loved one, we most often turn to our family and our friends looking for support. Sometimes we are met with reactions that surprise, disappoint and even hurt us. During the holidays, and especially the first ones after losing a loved one, we may particularly need to depend on these people to help us walk through the days and weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's which is often no easy journey.

Often friends, and even family members, of those affected by loss are unsure how to act or what to say in order to support their grieving loved one. Do know that it is okay to express your feelings and desires with friends and family over the Holidays. Be honest with the people who walk beside you – remember they love you and want what is best for you.

Below is a list of things that you may wish to pass along to friends and family members to help them help you not only during the holidays but throughout the year.

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### Tips for Helping Me Through the Holidays and Beyond

- Please, talk about my deceased loved one at holiday gatherings. It is OK to say their name – please, do – I like to hear it.
- Be a quiet listener – let me talk about my loved one and share memories as well as feeling associated with the loss. Active listening from family and friends is an important step in helping me start to heal – I don't need you to worry about being conversational, I only need you to listen.
- Ignoring my grief does not make it go away – if I am sad, let me be sad – do not try to cheer me up – it is important for me to feel the emotions I am feeling.
- Let me cry if I need to – you don't have to say anything – just be there for me.
- Sometimes it may appear that I am functioning fine and that I am doing well – understand that outward appearance can be deceiving.
- Understand that I may not be able to do everything I used to do in holidays past but don't hesitate to invite me to holiday events anyway.
- Don't make comments about next year being better or "time healing my wounds" – my concerns are focused on the here and now.
- Be supportive of me and the way I choose to handle the holidays – I may want to follow traditions or I may choose to change my rituals. Please, remember that there is no right way or wrong way to handle the holidays.
- Do offer to help me with baking and/or cleaning – these tasks can be overwhelming when dealing with the emotions associated with grief.
- Do offer to help me decorate for the holidays – but please do understand if I choose not to decorate this year.

