

## **A Guide to Holiday Survival for Bereaved Parents**

Try any or all of these and please know there is no right way. There is only your way. It is my hope that you are able to use this Guide to help you find your own way. I lost my son 15 years ago and have found these strategies helpful personally. I have learned to live again with joy and laughter. I wish the same for you.

### **Decorating**

*You may or may not want to decorate according to your traditions. Your feelings about decorating may change as years pass. Take some time to consider what is right for you this Holiday Season. It may be that decorating is too much and so take a pass or just buy a poinsettia.*

### **Entertaining**

*Entertaining can be such a joy for some people or a horror for others. There is no right way to do it as a Bereaved Parent. It is important to note that for a freshly Bereaved Parent thinking and organizing and planning can be monumental tasks. Attending an event can be overwhelming. Hosting an event may be too much to expect of yourself depending on how fresh your loss is. Please go easy on yourself. Make your choices based on what supports you this Holiday Season. Take it one year at a time.*

### **Traditions**

*It is important to take some time to consider your child and any traditions they loved. If you are able to set up a ritual around a holiday tradition that honors your child it can be comforting. This practice gives you a chance to feel connected to your child. You may find in the beginning that traditions are too painful. However, as the years pass rituals become a treasure.*

### **Crying**

*I maybe ought to have put this as the number one thing on the list. You are going to shed tears for your child over the Holidays. It is important to give yourself the space to cry without feeling like you are bringing others down. Often bereaved parents will feel the need to cry after an event that their child would have attended with them. Prepare yourself for the tears that are likely to come after an event where you have had a good time.*

### **Take a Pass**

*The first Christmas after my son passed we didn't participate in Christmas. We told our families that we wouldn't be celebrating this year. It was what we needed to do. I couldn't celebrate without my son - it would have been his first Christmas. If you are able to and it supports where you are at in your grieving process, then by all means take a pass on the Holidays. Some people go away to another country. Remember you will take your grief with you wherever you go. A vacation may or may not be helpful to your process. Again, it is up to you. There is no right answer. I spent a couple of months with my father in Singapore after my son died. I don't much remember it, but I was there.*

## **Be Prepared for Small Talk at Parties**

*One of my friends from The Compassionate Friends used to dread social gatherings because she didn't know how to answer the question "How many kids do you have?". She found it would lead to conversation that she didn't want. Her son had died by suicide and she didn't want to speak about it with strangers at parties but invariably the conversation would go there. So we helped her to come up with strategies for answering the tough questions like "What is your son up to?" or "Where is your son?" She would say things like "He's at home in his room resting". It was true but not the truth. It satisfied the conversational needs of the moment without sacrificing her emotional wellbeing to a stranger. Being prepared with answers for questions you don't want to answer is totally acceptable. If you become friends later, the person will understand completely.*

## **Find Comfort**

*This is a rough time of year for people, especially so for bereaved parents. Please do take the time to reflect and explore what brings you comfort. Simple things like a hot bath, a day of seasonal activities, listening to music or indulging in a hot apple cider by the fire may come easily. It will be necessary to seek comfort actively as it likely isn't something that you are naturally feeling. You may need to ask for help from family and friends. Comfort is fleeting for the bereaved parent - remember that. If you are only able to find a few minutes here or there of comfort, consider this a wild success. Celebrate the small successes you will have and try to grow from there.*

## **Seek Joy**

*This may be an impossible task if you are very freshly bereaved. However, it is still a worthy activity for Holiday Survival. Remember your child and how much they love you. What would they want for you? I know my son would not want me to destroy myself over his loss. I knew that from the beginning. It gave me comfort and it also gave me permission to seek joy in small ways throughout the day.*

## **Self-Care**

*Self-care activities are imperative over the Holidays for everyone. However, for a Bereaved Parent they are paramount. Self-care is a unique personal expression. It will look different to different people. Self-care can be staying home if you don't feel up to going to an event. It can be an outing with family or friends. It can be a quiet conversation over tea. There are many forms it can take. Please do take good care of yourself this holiday season.*

I hope you have found this to be helpful. Remember there is no right way through your grief, there is only your way through your grief.

Sending you love and light

Vanessa Hutton,  
Bowser, BC