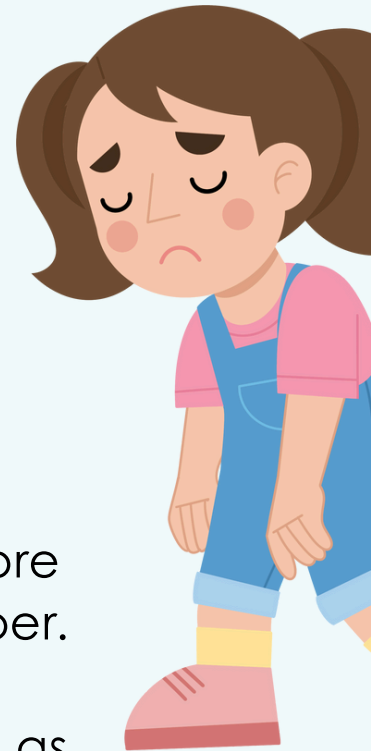




SUPPORTIVE IDEAS FOR FAMILIES WITH GRIEVING CHILDREN



Special events and holidays can be even more challenging after the death of a family member.

Here are some tips to consider that may help as you navigate the challenges, as well as a Planning Worksheet to help you work through these decisions together as a family.



TIPS FOR SPECIAL EVENTS OR HOLIDAYS

1. Plan ahead.

Anxiety and anticipation leading up to a special event or holiday can be more intense than the actual event. Planning ahead can help lower anxiety, especially for children. Once you've decided what you can and can't do, share your decisions with friends and family.

2. Don't let other people determine what you “should” (or “shouldn't”) do.

You don't have to do what others think you should do. Give yourselves the right to do what you want to do!

3. Accept limitations.

You may not be able to do all the things you've always done. Which aspects of family events and holidays are especially challenging for your family? Consider scaling back or changing things you may have done in the past, and consider what has been or might be especially enjoyable or meaningful to your family.

4. Celebrate different feelings and preferences.

Involve your children in discussions about what they would like to do. You and your family may decide to keep everything the same or change everything – or you may fall somewhere in-between.

5. Be informed before attending events.

Find out who will be there, how long it's expected to last, and whether you need to do anything to prepare for it. As a family, brainstorm ways you and your children want to respond to questions or offers of help from others.

6. Ask for help, even when it's hard to do.

If it feels right, allow people to help in concrete ways such as cleaning, cooking, baking, shopping, childcare, and running errands. Sometimes we worry about burdening others, but more often than not, they are eager to help.

7. Find time for rest.

Special events and holidays can be physically and emotionally draining, especially if you're grieving. Encourage rest and quiet play at times, and plan for healthy eating and hydration for the entire family.

WAYS FOR FAMILIES TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THE PERSON WHO DIED

Some ideas to consider:



Light a memorial candle.

Invite children and other friends/family to share memories.

Write a card or letter to the person who died.

Write memories on strips of paper and use them to create a paper chain.

Hang a special decoration in memory of the person.

Decorate a jar, everyone can write a special note to put inside or place cards or pieces of paper with memories inside.

Buy a gift the person would have liked and donate it to a charity.

Create a scrapbook of memories/photos or create a “digital scrapbook” with a blog or website to remember your loved one by.



Find a tree in the woods, place a special stone or rock as a marker, and go frequently as a special place to remember your loved one.

Frame a piece of clothing or create a shadow box with special items that remind you of your loved one.

Buy a holiday ornament each year to remember your loved one.

Have a loved one's ring made into a new setting for a necklace.

Create a memory quilt or stuffed animal using photos and/or clothing items from your loved one to cuddle up with.

Start a collection of stories, poems, or quotes. Place them in a book that honors your loved one and add to these each year.

Have a watch engraved with his/her name, or carry a locket with a photo to remember them always.

Or design a special ritual all of your own. Remember, all that's important is that it is meaningful to you!



SPECIAL EVENT OR HOLIDAY PLANNING WORKSHEET

The Family Meeting

We suggest working through this worksheet together with your children. Pick a place to meet (in your home or someplace else) that feels safe and comfortable and set aside enough time for everyone to be able to talk. Take breaks when necessary. If one long meeting seems like too much, break it up into shorter ones, or bring up a question/ topic to discuss one at a time.

Let everyone know that their thoughts and opinions will be acknowledged and that each person will have a chance to speak. Because grief is so individual and unique, family members might have different feelings about certain holidays, special days and family traditions. If a disagreement comes up, you can ask clarifying questions to help each person express their thoughts and feelings about wanting or not wanting to do something.

A good communication skill is to repeat back your understanding of what someone said, to check on if you heard them correctly. By doing this, it will be easier to clear up misunderstandings and find solutions that work for everyone.

Questions to consider during the family meeting.

What did this upcoming day mean to the person who died? What do each of us need for support (hugs, privacy, time with friends) and who can we ask for help? How will we handle it if one person wants to do something and another person doesn't?

FOOD

What foods do we typically cook? What were the favorite foods of the person who died? Who can help this year? Do we want to cook at home or go out? What will we make or buy?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

DECORATIONS

Do we want to put up decorations this year? What were the favorite decorations of the person who died? Do we want to create decorations to honor the person who died?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

FAMILY TRADITIONS

Traditions to think about: Sending cards/newsletters, attending faith or community services, taking a trip or vacation, visiting the cemetery or memorial spot for the person who died.

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

POST HOLIDAYS

January and February can be daunting months even during the best of circumstances, so it can be helpful to have something to look forward to that isn't connected to the holiday season.

What have you traditionally done for New Year's Eve and Day? What do you normally do during January and February? What did the person who died enjoy doing? You may want to plan a trip or some other special event after the holidays end.

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

REFLECTION

Just as you set aside time to have a family meeting to create a plan, it's equally important to meet and talk about how things went for each of you.

Let family members know ahead of time that there will be a chance to discuss what worked, what didn't, what you want to do differently next year, and to check in about how people are doing now that the special event or holiday has passed.
It can be important to let others know what they did that was especially helpful or caring.

Reflect on how it went for each of you.

List what you want to continue or anything you wish to change for next year.



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