**Holidays and Special Days are Challenging as We Are Coping with Holiday Grief.**

Special days, like holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, Sundays and many, many others, offer challenges to anyone who has suffered a loss. These days are glaring reminders (as if they were needed) of the absence of a loved one. We may find that our emotionality is heightened just prior, during and just after any special day. Many people who are grieving are surprised at this phenomenon and truly feel blindsided.



Another surprise that often catches people unaware is the emotional difficulty they experience during the second year. This is often true because people think that they have managed this particular event without the loved one, so it will be easier the second time. They do not prepare for the emotional impact and are shocked. Or, they realize, with hindsight, that during the particular event in the first year they were still quite numb, and in the second year they are fully feeling their feelings.

**Here Are Some Tips for Coping with Holiday Grief:**

* Get plenty of rest.
* Any special day can be difficult.
* Set reasonable expectations for yourself. Don't try to do everything and see everyone.
* Be realistic about what can and cannot be done.
* Schedule brief breaks to be alone.
* Try to tell those around you what you really need, since they may not know how to help you. Ask for their understanding if you withdraw from an activity that doesn’t feel like a good idea to you.
* Acknowledge to yourself that the occasion may be painful at times.
* Let yourself feel whatever you feel.
* Express feelings in a way that is not hurtful.
* Don’t be afraid to rethink traditions. Keep in mind that traditions, even long-standing ones, can be changed and can be resumed next year, or not.

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*Make Beautiful Christmas Eggs instead of a Gingerbread House*

* Limit your time – grief is emotionally and physically exhausting.
* Take time for yourself for relaxation and remembrance.
* Honor the memory of a loved one – give a gift or donation in his or her name, light a candle, display pictures and/or share favorite stories with supportive people.
* Discuss, ahead of time with family and/or friends, what each person can do to make this time special. Share in the responsibility, and see what can be eliminated or included to keep it less stressful.
* If celebrating does not feel right, try volunteering this year.

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*Volunteers Serving Holiday Dinners*

* Think about what part of this event you are not looking forward to, and discuss with other participants ahead of time, what can be done to change it.
* Remember, it is okay to laugh and enjoy yourself.
* Leave an event early if you want or need to.
* Make a shopping list ahead of time and shop on a good day.
* Propose a toast to your loved one and invite people to share memories.
* Give yourself permission to cut back on holiday decorations, preparations and gift-giving.

**Coping with Grief on Holidays and Special Events Worksheet**

*Choose ﬁve of the sentence-starters below and write in the ﬁrst thoughts that come to your mind.*

*Examples:*

* *My birthday is no long as joyful since my loved one died.*
* *My birthday reminds me of all the previous birthdays we spent together.*
* *My birthday gives me an aging and vulnerable feeling.*

My birthday \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

On \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, my concern is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Buying gifts is\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Special family events (graduations, weddings, births, etc.) are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s birthday is coming up soon and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

On holidays I am still expected to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

Special events feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

The anniversary will be coming soon and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

On holidays I feel obligated to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

The weekends \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

*Go back to the list of coping skills. See if any of those suggestions will help. Jot them down next to what you have already written.*