

## Holiday Blues – Getting Through Christmas When You’ve Had a Loss

While Christmastime is supposed to be a time of happiness, joy, fellowship and hopes for the coming new year, if you’ve experienced a loss, the season can instead be a painful reminder of the terrible loss you are feeling. Here are a few ideas of ways to cope with a loss through the holidays:

Be patient and realistic. Darcie Sims, PhD and nationally certified grief counselor, recommends that you leave out the word “ought.” When you are grieving, your energy is depleted, and it is important to be gentle with yourself and be realistic with your expectations. Give yourself permission to not put up any decorations, to simplify your celebration, to order food in or eat out this year, or to even cancel celebrating Christmas the same way all together this year if you want to.

Adapt family traditions. Let yourself be creative with some family traditions, or start new ones in memory of your loved one. For instance, Susan Dunn, MA, Life Coach, tells of one widow who set out her husband’s Christmas stocking with a journal beside it, inviting visitors to write in it. One year soon after our family had recently lost our parents, we adopted two sailors from the Great Lakes Naval Base to spend the day and have Christmas dinner with us. It meant so much to have one of the sailor’s mom tearfully thank me over the phone for inviting her son to spend his first Christmas away from home with our family, and I was able through my own tears to let her know the joy it brought us to have him here, and lessen the void of missing family members.

Look for joy amidst the pain. While letting yourself mourn and feel the sadness and grief, you can also try to remember the wonderful moments and memories of your loved one(s). Sharing stories, journaling or writing a memory book, looking through photos or videos of past Christmases, or lighting a candle for your loved one are some ways that can help you celebrate the joys your loved one’s life has brought to you and your family.

Focus on the meaning of Christmas. The pain of your loss can be eased by focusing on God’s promises to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Through prayer, reading the Word and accepting the love and fellowship of others, you allow your heavenly Father’s love to bring you through the grief you are experiencing. You will be able to have a perspective that can strengthen you, deepen your faith, and help you carry on through your time of loss. As clinical psychologist Larry Nadig, PhD, recommends, if you apply the principles of the *Serenity Prayer*, and pray in your mourning for the serenity to accept what you cannot change, ask for the courage to change the things you can and the wisdom to know the difference, then serenity will replace your holiday blues.