## Guidance for Christmas: Not As Easy As One, Two, Three…

## Everyone can master a grief but he that has it. Shakespeare

Those of us who have maneuvered through the first few years of grief know that those years can be a very difficult time to experience. Coping with one’s grief due to the death of a loved one prior to this holiday season is not easier (than during this season) but the anticipation, the activities, the focus on family, the blessings and cheer can amplify the magnitude of our loss and missing.

Although we all know that each of us must travel this journey in our own time, our own way and following our own heart, anyone can benefit from arming themselves with coping strategies to navigate this different and difficult time of year. Although there is no specific formula to prescribe that will guarantee success for easier grieving, simplicity is the watchword for this time in order to avoid being more overwhelmed during an already paralyzing situation.

Rather than listing a variety of helpful hints as to “what to do” to cope with the stress during the holiday season, it seems more appropriate to offer a simple, overall plan in how to view the season differently since you are living life differently since your loved one’s death. Coping can and will be overwhelming at times and thus listing specific dos and don’t may not apply to each individual nor will they be remembered. (Thus adding to one’s frustration due to the lack of memory retention grief produces)

As grief is a personal endeavor, one must view their coping individually also. Although it would be ideal to have family or friends collaborating with you in your plans, cooperation is not always available in all families and the variety of outcomes can set the griever up for disappointment, anger and resentment.

To avoid the fear and dread of the holidays, consider the following strategy:

* ***Think*** about a different plan. Consider compromises to do things differently this year. Difficult as this is when your focus might be on surviving the minutes of the day it might be helpful to at least consciously note the possibilities during this season. You may want to change holiday tradition, activities or how, when or where you celebrate the season. You may want to change your mind and redecide previous decisions sometime during the holiday season. Make an escape plan if met with surprises, triggers or unexpected feelings that arise. (ie: take your own vehicle to family functions or arrange with an understanding friend to change plans if the need arises)
* ***Remember***your loved one during this season and incorporated them into the celebrations. Share your memories and encourage others to talk about them. Recognize their continued presence in your life. Create commemorative rituals or events to honor or memorialize them. (wreaths, ornaments, live trees, yearly ornaments, music, recipes, memory box, etc) Lighting candles, creating a special memento, event, decoration or donating to an organization in your child’s name lifts you and your child.
* ***Give*** yourself permission to grieve and/or enjoy the holidays. Our lives are permanently altered after the death of a loved one and the holidays will never be the same. Take care of yourself by not having expectations of yourself, allow yourself to feel your emotions and do not feel guilty if you do find you are enjoying yourself or some part of the holidays.

The pain of grief cannot be cured, removed or healed but must be navigated and experienced.

Holidays, anniversaries and special memories will intensify the pain. This holiday season necessitates special care and love for you.

I wish there was a prescription to guide the bereaved through holiday grieving. But there are no shortcuts or steps to guide all grievers toward healing. But hopefully with some ***thinking****,* ***remembering*** and ***giving***you will be able to manage your fears about surviving the holidays as well as providing hope for your entire grief journey.