TIPS FOR GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS WHEN YOU ARE GRIEVING

- **Acknowledge that this year will be different.** Eliminate whatever you need to. There is nothing you must do. Grief depletes energy. Because of this lessened energy, the simplest of tasks may loom large and insurmountable. How can you face dinners and parties when smiling and laughter feel like the twist of a knife in the raw wound of your loss? How can you attend religious services with all of their reminders and implied promises?

- **Decide ahead of time how you want to spend the holidays.** You may choose to be with family or alone, to go out of town or stay home with movies.

- **Do things that feel right for you,** not because your loved one would have wanted it that way, or because your family thinks you should.

- **Give yourself permission to change whatever traditions or rituals that you need to change.** Nothing is written in stone! Just because something has been done a certain way for twenty years doesn't mean that it is the only way to do it. Change things if you want to. The option to return to the old traditions will be there next year and the year after.

- **Break the silence** about your loved one so that others know that it is OK to talk about him or her with you.

- **Change the time, locations and/or menu of traditional meals.** Or eliminate them altogether this year. Attend religious services at a different time than usual or at another house of worship—or don't go at all this year. Decorate differently, have someone else decorate, decorate exactly the same as always or don't decorate at all. Open gifts at a different time than you did before.

- **Memorialize your loved one in some way that is both important to you and would have meaning for him or her.** It needn't be a large gesture, but it is helpful if it has a unique and personal value. You can acknowledge that your deceased loved one isn't there by putting a candle in their honor on the table, or making a toast, or by visiting the cemetery.

- **Break large tasks into small pieces.** Don't be afraid to delegate tasks to others.
Tell your family and friends what you need to feel supported. It may be to do shopping for you, help you cook dinner, or help you create new traditions. They would probably like to help you but don't know what to do. Tell them as specifically as you can.

Be flexible in your plans, knowing that your energy, moods and needs may change quickly.

Set aside time to be alone and grieve, to reminisce or journal.

Recognize the sources of discomfort, try to anticipate even the smallest part that might elicit pain, and then decide what can or cannot be faced, altered or eliminated.

Take care of your own health; guard your own strength and energy. It is OK to say, "No" to invitations. It is difficult to predict your feelings and energy levels, so it's also OK to change your mind at the last minute about attending dinners, parties and religious services or to leave a function early. You must be your own guide.

Be aware of the stresses of grief on your body and mind. Eat well (use sugar, caffeine and alcohol moderately), exercise, and get enough sleep.

If you wish to go away for the holidays, do so. Remember though that you will take your thoughts and your grief with you.

Do something you have never done before. Give your own life a degree of meaning and value no matter how bereft you are feeling.

Visit support groups, community memorials or church services with people that you know will support your experience.
Coping with the Holidays Checklist

Check what you would traditionally do with a (T) and then check with a (W) what you want to do this year. Share this with your family or have them do one of their own and compare notes.

**Holiday Cards**
- ___ Mail as usual
- ___ Shorten your list
- ___ Include a “Holiday Letter”
- ___ Elect to skip this year

**Decorations**
- ___ Decorate as usual
- ___ Modify your decorations
- ___ Ask for help
- ___ Let others do it
- ___ Make changes, such as: an artificial tree instead of a real one
- ___ Have a special decoration for your loved one
- ___ Eliminate the tree or other decorations

**Shopping**
- ___ Shop as usual
- ___ Give cash
- ___ Shop through catalogs
- ___ Ask for help
- ___ Shop early
- ___ Make your gifts
- ___ Give baked goods
- ___ Shop with a friend
- ___ Ask for help wrapping gifts
- ___ Do not exchange gifts now but perhaps later
- ___ Make a list of gifts you want before you go out

**Holiday Music**
- ___ Enjoy as usual
- ___ Avoid turning the radio on
- ___ Shop early before stores have holiday music on
- ___ Listen to it, have a good cry and allow yourself to feel sad

**Traditions**
- ___ Keep the old traditions
- ___ Attend holiday parties
- ___ Don’t attend holiday parties
- ___ Go to an entirely new place
- ___ Bake the usual holiday foods
- ___ Buy the usual holiday foods
- ___ Bake but modify what you would usually do
- ___ Go to the religious service
- ___ Do not attend religious service
- ___ Attend the religious service but at a different time
- ___ Attend a totally different religious service
- ___ Spend quiet time alone
- ___ Visit the cemetery
- ___ Open gifts on holiday eve
- ___ Open gifts on holiday day

**Holiday Dinner**
- ___ Prepare as usual
- ___ Go out for dinner
- ___ Invite friends over
- ___ Eat alone
- ___ Change time of dinner
- ___ Change routine of dinner, such as, this year do a buffet
- ___ Change location of dinner, eat in a different room
- ___ Ask for help

**Post Holidays**
- ___ Spend as usual
- ___ Remove holiday decorations early
- ___ Go out of town
- ___ Avoid New Year’s parties
- ___ Attend a New Year’s party
- ___ Spend time with only a few friends
- ___ Write in your journal your hopes for the new year
- ___ Go to a movie
- ___ Go to bed early
HOLIDAY MEMORIALS
IDEAS FOR MEMORIALIZING YOUR LOVED ONE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

There is power and comfort in personal rituals and memorialization. During the holidays and on special days, people often want to remember those who have died. Deciding how to commemorate their loved one during the holidays is a personal decision for each family. Here are some ideas that have worked for others:

• Start a meal or a celebration with a moment of silence. Someone can offer a toast or prayer whenever it seems appropriate.

• Place a single rose on the festival table in memory of the deceased.

• Ceremoniously put a special ornament on the tree to symbolize a favorite hobby of your loved one.

• Dedicate the 'shammes, the 'servant' or 'pilot light' from whose flame the other Chanukah candles are lit.

• Write special notes to the deceased, put them in his/her Christmas stocking, and then read them out loud during dinner.

• Go around the table, starting with children to adults and tell stories of the person who died. It can be a memorable and spontaneous stream of stories that bring enjoyment, laughter, and pleasure. (A tape recorder may be placed near each speaker to be transcribed at a later time in a permanent scrapbook of memories.)

• Offer the chair where the deceased sat at the dinner table to the youngest grandchild to designate the continuity of generations.

• Make a special dish or offer a food item that the person who died particularly loved.

• Look through photo albums and/or show home movies to recall the good memories.

• Write a poem and read it in memory of your loved one.

• Play a favorite recording of a song that your loved one enjoyed.
PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS
QUESTIONS THAT CAN HELP YOU PLAN AHEAD

1. What is it about the approaching holidays that most concerns you?

2. Who can I turn to for help (family, friends, faith community, support groups)?

3. What do you need for others to understand about you during this time?

4. What can other people do to help you?

5. What can you refrain from doing?

6. What can you do to help others?

7. What are some creative ways you might handle the holiday celebrations so you can be true to the spirit of the season while being honest about the loss you have suffered?
A CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL

During special times, it is might be difficult to find ways to include your whole family and your loved one in a time of sharing. A beautiful way to accomplish this may be to create a new tradition by using four candles in a centerpiece - advent wreaths work perfectly - and as you light the candles, read the following words:

As we light these four candles in your honor, we light one for our sadness, one for our memories, one for our determination, and one for our love.

We light this candle for our **sadness**. The pain of losing you is intense, and the grief we feel is often hard to handle. We want you to know that we miss you so much.

We light this candle for our **memories**. There is so much we remember - your smile, your laugh - the good times and the bad ones, too - when we were angry and when we were happy - all those times that never could have been lived with anyone but you. We want you to know that we will always remember.

We light this candle for our **determination**. Knowing you has brought us strength. We are changed because of you. Your life has made a difference in our lives. We want you to know that we will take the energy of your living to help us move forward in our own lives.

We light this candle for our **love**. The specialness that we shared with you can never be replaced. During this holiday season, our love for you will shine as brightly as this candle. We will pass that love on to others, and as we do, our hearts will smile because of you. We want you to know that we will always love you.

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AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

Sometimes when the holidays are over, we experience a letdown kind of sadness and depression. Visiting family has gone home, all of the gatherings are over, the decorations come down, and we are left with more time alone and more silence. In some ways, this may be a relief. In others, it may remind us that we are not being buffered from our feelings as we were when there were so many holiday distractions around. The holidays can often be followed by a period of exhaustion from so much socializing, overeating, and drinking.

As we move through these darkest, coldest, shortest days of the year, we also find ourselves indoors more, and this in itself can be depressing and lonely. There are some things we can do to make this time of year easier and prevent some of the post-holiday depression.

- Get outside during the day when the sun is out, even if it is just for a short walk. Mild exercise and sunlight help replenish our bodies and spirits.

- Make efforts to connect with people you enjoy and who can understand your experience. If you reconnected with someone over the holidays that you feel can support you well, let them know that you would like to continue having them in your life. Making lunch plans once or twice a month can keep you connected to the support system you have.

- Grief support groups offer you a chance to be with other people who have gone through death loss and who are having similar experiences. Even if you have never been "a group kind of person", support groups can provide invaluable information, support and comfort in discovering that you truly are not alone.

- Take time to send cards or letters to people you saw during the holidays or didn't get to see during the holidays. It will help remind you that you do have connections with others that will go on throughout the rest of the year.

The holidays may have brought up feelings that you thought you were through having or ones you didn't know you had. While it may be hard to sit still with the silence and feel the discomfort, it is often in this very silence and stillness that we rediscover the true depth of our sorrow and the true depth of our love.