

# Helping The Healing Begin



## BEREAVED FAMILIES OF ONTARIO

*Cornwall & Area*

## FAMILLES ENDEUILLÉES DE L'ONTARIO

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## SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

**BE KIND TO YOURSELF:** This is a time when it is important to take good care of you. Nothing you do will make a bigger difference than respecting yourself, your needs and your feelings. Handling your emotions may be the only job you can manage right now. Because no one knows your needs as well as you do, you need to notice them and honour them. Don't overwhelm yourself just because it is the holiday season. Instead, do only as much as you can comfortably manage. Get the rest and nourishment and affection you need. Choose what's best for you, to be with people or to spend time alone, to be immersed in the holiday spirit or not.

**EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS:** The surest road through grief is to feel it, not deny it. If you are hurting, the best advice is to allow your feelings. Cry if you need to cry, rage if you need to rage. Admit the longings, the loneliness or whatever you are feeling. Don't suppress yourself. Feelings expressed ultimately disappear, but when you suppress yourself, nothing changes.

**ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED:** Other people do not know how you feel unless you tell them. Don't just go along with people or plans that are not for you. Tell people what would help you most. Friends and relatives may think you will feel better if you do not talk about your loss, or they may be afraid to upset you by mentioning the missing person. People outside your grief may feel awkward and not know what to do. As much as they want to help, they need you to direct them. Don't be afraid to ask for help with planning, shopping, entertaining or just getting through today. As hard as it may be to ask, force yourself. Ultimately, asking will make your life a little easier. If you cannot shop or decorate this year, ask a friend, relative, hospice or other social agency volunteer to help. What looks arduous to you may be a lot of fun for someone else. As hard as it may be to imagine, remember that serving you can be very satisfying and rewarding for the other person.

**CREATE SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF:** Sharing your pain eases it. Be sure you have people with whom you can talk. Most of us can cope best with tough times if we have a loving presence, a relative or friend to walk with us through this painful time. When spouses or family members hurt as much as you do and cannot be a support, find an alternative. Look for a short-term support partner, perhaps a friend, another person in grief, a relative, a counselor. Or, create a small group of people who have similar concerns with whom you can stay in touch daily or frequently through the holidays or beyond. Support people and support groups really help.

**HELP ANOTHER IN NEED:** Contributing to someone else gets your attention off yourself. Helping another can be a very effective way of healing after a loss, because when you are immersed in someone else's needs, you can be free of your own distress and pain. If you have the energy, there are many people who need you. Some possibilities are to volunteer to be with older folks or children, to help in a hospital or a soup kitchen, or to help a friend in need over the holidays.

**APPRECIATE YOUR OTHER LOVED ONES:** Enjoy the people you love. It is natural to feel alone in your grief and to want to isolate yourself, yet that closes off all chances for closeness and nourishment from other people. Don't deprive your children, spouse, other loved ones or yourself. As hard as it may be to get your attention off your loss, they need your love too. And in return, their love can nourish you and help you begin to heal.

**DON'T COMPARE YOUR LIFE WITH OTHER PEOPLE:** Feeling jealous of intact families and feeling deprived are natural reactions after a loss—as if other families are happier than yours, as if other people have what you do not. We have a lot of illusions about how other people live. Actually, for many intact families, reunions can be stressful and upsetting. Contrary to our illusions, holiday times are often not ideal times for families, intact or not. Don't try to compare lives; it only adds to your misery. Embracing what you have gives you much more power than regretting what is missing.

**RESOLVING HOW OR WHERE TO SPEND THE HOLIDAYS:** Choosing how or where to spend the holidays may be your biggest dilemma. There is no perfect solution. Holiday time may be hard no matter what you do or where you are. In fact, it may seem as if you are trying to pick the best from some rotten alternatives. The choices: celebrate as usual, avoid the holidays altogether, or do something brand new.

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