



**The
Community Hospice
Grief Center**

**Bereavement Services
Administrative Offices
Macedonia Church**

26 Wilson Avenue
Albany, NY 12205
Phone: 518-915-1914

**Community Hospice
of Albany County**

445 New Karner Road
Albany, NY 12205
Phone: 518-724-0200
Fax: 518-724-0299

**Community Hospice
of Amsterdam**

246 Manny Corners Rd.
Amsterdam, NY 12010
Phone: 518-843-5412
Fax: 518-843-9057

**Community Hospice
of Columbia/Greene**

47 Liberty Street
Catskill, NY 12414
Phone: 518-943-5402
Fax: 518-943-0776

**Community Hospice
of Rensselaer County**

295 Valley View Blvd.
Rensselaer, NY 12144
Phone: 518-285-8100
Fax: 518-285-8145

**Community Hospice
of Saratoga &
Washington Counties**

179 Lawrence Street
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
Phone: 518-581-0800
Fax: 518-581-9460

**Community Hospice
of Schenectady County**

Phone: 518-377-8846
Fax: 518-377-8868

Tips for Getting Through the Holidays

When we are grieving, our holiday traditions and rituals can be constant reminders of our loss. While nothing can replace our loved one, there are things we can do to make the holidays easier. They will be different, and they may hurt, but they can still be meaningful.

Take care of yourself.

- Eat well, limit sugar and alcohol, and try to get enough rest.
- Make time for activities that you find healing.
- Let yourself feel your feelings, the bad and the good. Enjoyment is still an important part of living, and doesn't mean that you miss your loved one less.
- Let friends and family know if you need someone to talk to, a shoulder to cry on, or someone to help with something your loved one always did with you or for you during the holidays.

Set realistic limits.

- Don't try to do it all. Ask yourself and your family what you need to make the holiday feel special, and what can comfortably be put on hold. Make sure to share the responsibility for the holiday among family members.
- If you don't have a lot of energy this holiday season, it's okay to step back a bit. You can avoid distressing shopping trips by doing catalog or internet shopping, or by giving gifts of cash, gift certificates, or checks. Consider skipping cards or sending them more selectively. Let someone else bake the cookies this year.
- Limiting the time you spend at family and social gatherings can conserve precious energy. Allow yourself to change your mind about social engagements, even at the last minute, or to leave an event early if you need to.

Consider changing your routines.

- After a loss, some people are more comforted by keeping things as close to normal as possible, while others prefer to do something completely different. Find the mixture and balance that's just right for you.
- Involve children and teens in planning for the holiday, and make sure to prepare them for any changes in holiday routines.
- Having the holiday meal at a different location or different time of day, or going out to eat, may ease some stress. You may also choose to change how holiday decorations are done, or to open gifts at a different time or location.

Celebrate the memory of your loved one.

- Set aside a special time or create a special way in which to honor the memory of your loved one: make a gift or donation in their name, light a candle, or put out a picture or photo album. A time to share favorite stories or memories can also be valuable.
- Don't expect your holidays to be "perfect." Be patient with yourself as you move through the changes grief brings. Remember: grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of giving and receiving love.

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