Grief and the Holidays

1) **Be Proactive and plan ahead.**
   Many believe that those who experience the most difficulty with the holidays are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. They think that they can just get through it without noticing.
   Some people try to avoid the pain that comes from planning. During the planning process, they will experience some emotional pain. However, as much as it hurts. It is helpful. When the holiday actually arrives, it is likely to be much less painful that anticipated.

2) **There is no escaping the holidays.**
   Escaping as a coping mechanism simply does not work. Some people try to escape the holidays by leaving town and avoiding family and old traditions all together.
   However, they often come back more depressed that when they left. No matter where one tries to go, there will most likely be holiday music, decorations and advertisements that act as constant reminders.

3) **Holidays will never be the same.**
   The key here is understanding that things will not be as they once were, and trying to make them that way will be disappointing. It may be helpful to do things just a bit differently. This can acknowledge the change and, at the same time, preserve some continuity with the past. In other words, a little different menu, some different decorations, or starting a new holiday tradition may provide that slight but significant change.

4) **Holiday plans will affect other family members.**
   Help the individual understand that their holiday plans will affect their family members. It is important to talk their plans over with their family, listen to their family's choices, and express their own feelings and needs honestly. Encourage the individual to involve everyone to become involved in holiday plans as they feel comfortable doing so with feeling guilty about their choices.

5) **There is no "right way" to celebrate the holidays**
   There are going to be so many decisions to make. Invitations need to be accepted or declined. What about cooking and preparing meals? Should the house be decorated? What would be best for the kids? What about traditions? Should new ones be tried? Should a visit be made to the cemetery that day?
   Sometimes there are so many decisions to be made that it becomes overwhelming. It can be helpful during these times to explain to the individual that there is no "right way" to celebrate the holidays

Things can be done differently because nothing is written in stone. For instance, a family might choose to go to Florida and have a Christmas picnic on the beach. In the past, the mother had to make the entire Christmas dinner, but now she is gone. Instead of trying to replicate what she did and bring about intense sadness, the family decides to implement a change in tradition, as long as the whole family agrees with the change.

6) **Change and Growth go hand in hand.**
Persons grieving need to give themselves permission to change traditions and rituals if they want. View these changes as growth. Change should never be looked at as dishonoring the loved one in any way.
The individual can always go back to the old traditions if they choose to the next year and the year after that.

7) **Take Care of you: Physically, Emotionally, Socially, Spiritually**
The last concept deals with individuals taking care of themselves. It is helpful to think of this concept in relation to a car with four wheels. The four wheels represent the four dimensions of living. The key is to realize that if even one wheel is broken, the car will not run very well. All four wheels need to be working at least fairly well to run. The four wheels are the physical wheel, the emotional wheel, the social wheel, and the spiritual wheel.

Physical Care:
Be sure that you:
Eat well and wisely.
Get Plenty of rest.
Get plenty of exercise, as this is a good stress reducer.
Consume alcohol in moderation

Emotional Care:
It is okay to feel sad. Many individuals feel the pressures, depression, and fatigue that come with the holidays even if they are not dealing with a loss. Most people who are grieving do not usually progress through a linear series of stages. Instead, they bounce from one emotion to another, much like a pinball machine, while the grief process runs its course. (Baier & Buechsel, 2012)

On the other hand, it is also okay to feel good. In other words, it's okay to feel good, laugh, and have fun without feeling guilty that they're enjoying an activity. You may feel that you should be mourning or that others will say bad things about you. Feeling good and laughing is the body's way of releasing stress.

Spiritual care:
Time should be taken for prayer, meditation, or reflection, especially in the middle of a challenge or at the beginning and end of each day. Spiritual time can renew, as well as help put things in perspective. Some may find consolation in attending religious services or other religious activities. Some people

write in a daily journal during the holiday season. Journaling is helpful, as it can become a forum for feelings.

Social Care:

Let families and friends know what you can handle. You should choose to be around positive people and those with whom you feel comfortable sharing your feelings. Think in advance about how to reply when people ask, "How are you doing?" That is usually asked by well-intentioned people, but it is a tough question to answer.