

HOLIDAY

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Set Healthy Boundaries.

YOU decide where, when, and how YOU want to spend the holidays. Well-meaning loved ones and friends may have lots of ideas, but you must be in control of the decisions. Be honest and tell people what you do and do not want to do for the holidays. It's ok to skip some holiday events or Zoom's on days you feel overwhelmed. Avoid the "shoulds" whether they come from loved ones or your own head. Communicate clearly about what feels ok this year. Please don't worry about hurting someone else's feelings.

Plan Ahead.

Make a LIST for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Include everything, e.g., baking supplies, menus for yourself or others, gifts to buy, decorations you will use, religious events, concerts, movies to watch, books to read, etc. Spend some real time ahead of time. Create a VISION BOARD. Draw, or copy, print, and cut out photos and paste them on the board. Create a POST IT WALL. Could be satisfying to see your wall of notes when you just don't feel like thinking. Arrange for special ZOOMS. Enter dates on the calendar. Feel free to cancel anything at the last minute if you just don't feel like it!

Allow Yourself to Feel All Your Emotions.

Remember that crying is ok. It's also ok to feel angry and throw a shoe, or a pillow. Be careful not to break anything you might want later! Remember that it really is ok to laugh and feel moments of surprise joy. Consider gratitude even for the smallest stuff, like hot running water and electricity.

Find a Way to Honor Your Memories.

Create a special way to memorialize the person you've lost. Light a candle, set a place at the table, make a toast, serve your loved one's favorite dish, set out a favorite holiday photo or a whole table of photos with your loved one during the holidays, play his/her favorite music, create a new photo album or a collage, etc. OR DON'T!!!! Save it for another year because there will be more holidays! Gift some special items that belonged to your loved ones to family members and/or great friends.

Do Something Kind for Others.

Donate a holiday meal for a family in need. Shop for and donate holiday toys for needy children. Make a charitable monetary gift in your loved one's name. Buy a gift you might have chosen for your loved one and donate it in his/her name. Find a person in need of prayer and include them daily in your own prayers. Call someone whom you know is ill or lonely and offer support. Send cards, notes, texts to thank others in your life recent or long ago.

Do Something Kind for Yourself.

Practice self-care. Give yourself a special gift. Buy a new cozy blanket or pillow. Comfort is the name of the game! Make quiet time for yourself, e.g., meditation, silent prayer, listen to, write, or play music, journal, etc. Go online to find a video for exercise: tai chi, yoga, or qi gong. Take a long walk in a scenic area or go for a hike. Take your camera or cell phone and take pictures of the beauty in nature. Practice gratitude by writing three things you are grateful for every night in a bedside journal.

Ask for Help.

Don't be afraid to ask for help when you're struggling with the holidays. Reach out to a special friend or family member who will just listen. Reach out to a counselor. Call someone you know who has also lost a parent, sibling or spouse and comfort one another.

Create New Traditions.

Bake a new Thanksgiving dessert or Christmas cookie that you have never tried before. Host a Zoom watch party for a holiday movie or Mass on Christmas Eve. Visit your loved one's gravesite and leave a holiday item, e.g., wreath, poinsettia. Bundle up and go for a pre or post dinner walk. Write a card or letter to your loved one and put it under the tree or in a place of honor. Purchase a new holiday item each year in his/her honor. Buy a new outfit, sweater, or tie, fancy or leisure, and dress for the occasion.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world, be with us when we feel alone and feel only sorrow in our souls, help us to know the joy of the Gospel remains as true now as ever. When our hearts feel only grief, help us find consolation in knowing those who have died are held in your loving embrace. As we walk in times of darkness, give us faith that we are headed toward brighter days. Give light to our eyes, let us show to one another. Even in winter, when the ground is cold, it is warmed by the light of your creation; seeds are nourished, and green shoots are pushing up toward the sun. Lord Jesus be our Light. Amen