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Ten Tips to Surviving the Difficult Holidays After Your Child Dies

Oak Brook, IL—With Thanksgiving and the normally festive holidays around the corner, millions of families throughout the United States that have lost a child are struggling with how they can simply survive to see the new year.

“The stress that bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents face during the hustle and bustle of the holidays can feel overwhelming,” says Patricia Loder, executive director of The Compassionate Friends. “It is difficult for those who have not gone through the death of a child to understand the depth of despair which such a loss brings.”

The Compassionate Friends, with nearly 600 chapters and locations in every state, as well as Washington, DC and Puerto Rico, is a mutual assistance self-help organization for bereaved parents and families where more seasoned grievers help support the more newly bereaved.

Mrs. Loder, whose two young children died in a car crash in 1991, says there are many tips that can help a grieving family prepare for the holidays.

- 1) Plan ahead. Realize you will not be able to do everything with everyone. Decide what is truly important to you and your family.
- 2) Don't be afraid to ask friends for help. Tasks which may normally take little effort can feel overwhelming, whether it's fixing a meal, cleaning the house, or putting up decorations.
- 3) No one expects you to string rows and rows of lights just to prove you have the holiday spirit. If you don't feel up to past efforts, you may simply want to place an electric powered candle in your window in memory of your child.
- 4) Just because you've hosted holiday gatherings in the past doesn't mean you're obligated to this year. Others will understand.
- 5) After a child dies, old traditions are often left behind and new ones that incorporate the child who died can take their place. Honor the memory of your child in unique ways that have meaning to you.
- 6) Surviving children should be included in your plans. They, too, mourn their sibling, but need a normalcy the holidays can provide.
- 7) If you don't get everything done you plan, be easy on yourself. Grief is tough work and you should never feel guilty for not getting everything done.

8) If you must shop for others, find a time when the stores are not extremely busy like early morning, order through the Internet, or ask others to shop for you.

9) Participating in a memorial service, such as The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting the second Sunday in December, can be very meaningful. This can be done in a formal service with others or through a short private candle lighting in the privacy of your home.

10) Remember that the fearful anticipation of an approaching holiday is usually worse than the day itself.

“Many people believe they can escape the holidays by leaving home on a vacation,” adds Mrs. Loder. “This rarely helps because grief can never be left behind and it is important to have the support of relatives and friends. Talking with others who have also lost a child can help those facing grief to understand they are not alone. Others have survived the holidays and they will, too.”

The Compassionate Friends has a presence in an estimated 29 countries around the world. For information on a local chapter or for other means of support, call toll-free 877-969-0010 or visit The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org.

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