

Help for the Holidays for Bereaved Families

Kids Path Program, Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro (HPCG)

Help for the Holidays for families who have experienced the death of a loved one

As the holiday season approaches, you may find your feelings of grief becoming more intense and harder to cope with.

As the holidays approach, ask yourself:

- **Who supports us?** Identify the important people in your life who understand and accept you and your family and where you are in your grief. Let them know what you are feeling about the holidays and how they may be able to help you and your family through this confusing time. Could they help prepare a meal, wrap presents or decorate the house? Could they spend extra time with your children offering support, acceptance and reassurance? Remind yourself it is ok to ask for help.
- **How difficult is this really going to be?** Often the anxiety we feel as the holidays grow closer is worse than the holidays themselves. Give yourself permission to embrace change this year and be gentle with yourself and your children as you approach the season one day at a time. You may find there are more tender moments than sad ones.
- **What are our plans for the holidays this year?** Recognize that you and your family have choice in how you celebrate the holidays. Keeping things exactly the same is often not realistic after so much has changed. As a family, list of the things you typically do during the holiday season and then decide together:
 - What is most important to each of you?
 - What do we want to do this year?
 - What could we let go of?
 - What could we do differently?

Focus on making holiday plans that all members of the family are comfortable with and that help your family feel safe, supported and nurtured.

- **How do we incorporate our memories?** New traditions can include remembering your loved one in a special way. Some ideas to consider include:
 - Memory box or Stocking
 - Special ornaments for the tree
 - Lighting a candle on a significant day
 - Incorporate a holiday activity that your loved one really enjoyed
 - Visit a place that was special to your loved one
 - Send messages tied to balloons.
 - Help others in memory of your loved one. Help a child or family in need of gifts for Christmas, or volunteer at a local soup kitchen.
- **How can I help myself to not feel so overwhelmed?** First, tell yourself that you will do only what you know is best for you and your family and not what others think you should do. Feel empowered to say "no" and be comfortable with scaling back. When making plans with your family, let them know you may not have the energy to decorate the tree or bake cookies or send out holiday cards. You might find that your children want to try making the cookies this year or that no one is excited about decorating and wants permission to forgo it this year. Remember, you can always add back things in the years to come.