HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Grief & Mourning is hard work for your body, mind and soul at any time.

During the holidays and on other occasions such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, graduation or anniversary dates it can feel even more challenging.

Below are some helpful hints that you might want to consider when approaching special days, keeping in mind that everyone grieves and mourns in different ways.

What works for one person may not work for another – and that's ok!

Sometimes the worries and concerns that come with the anticipation of an event or special date are greater than the actual event. Take time to breathe and know that you will be ok – you have many resources within you to draw upon.

Communicate & Connect (*rather than becoming silent)*

*Create intentional time to talk about your loved one. Let your friends/family know that you need to talk about the person. Name the elephant in the room! This does not have to be a lengthy time; even a few minutes can help to release any tension or concern that you might be feeling.

*Listen and hear what other people have to say. Even if you are grieving the same person, everyone will have had a different relationship with them. Every person will experience unique feelings. Don't try to "fix" how someone else feels. Listen without judgment.

*Address tough questions. Consider in advance how you will address any questions surrounding the cause of death.

<u>Prepare your answers ahead of time</u> – its ok to politely express, that you do not want to talk about your loved one at this time. *" Thank you for your concern, I'm not ready to talk about them right now."*

* Know that there will be times of puddle jumping – times where you will move in and out of grief. It's ok to feel sad or angry at one moment and to laugh the next. This is normal- it just means that you are experiencing a range of human emotions.

Make a List. On your own and/or with family. What is important for each of you?

You can revisit this list as often as you need to over the upcoming months/years.

Keep - What traditions do you want to keep?
For example, Holiday tree, Birthday cake, Dinner out

Do differently – What would you like to do differently?
For example, Who will decorate tree, Different person could make cake or pie instead, choose a different restaurant, Chinese food instead of turkey etc.

Not this Year – What do you want/need to put a hold on?
For example, Trip out of town or country, baking, holiday parties,

Remove – What do you want/need to remove?
For example, Your spouse loved a certain food, you dislike it immensely – how important is it for you to have it at your holiday meal? No right or wrong answer – everyone may have different thoughts especially during the first large gathering.

*Keep in mind that some stability is necessary especially if there are young children or teens in your family. The holiday or special occasion will come regardless of any attempt to avoid it.

Escape Plan – Be prepared for strong emotions to be triggered at times. If you are not comfortable sharing your emotions in a larger crowd, have an escape plan in mind if you need a break. For Example, if you intentionally leave a small item in your car then "escaping" can be as easy as saying *"I forgot my ___, I'll just go get it."* This can help you to control where, how and with whom you will share your thoughts and feelings.

Building resiliency throughout the year helps during times of heightened emotions.

Take time to do something fun – just because.

Carry a photo of your loved one – it never has to leave your pocket but helps you feel connected no matter where you are or what you're doing.

Consider Journaling, drawing, painting, collaging, building – you don't have to be good at it – this is one way to take internal thoughts and feelings and give them an outward healing expression.

Meditation and Prayer –even a few minutes a day spent in silent contemplative focused thought can be both calming and energizing.

Self Care – Plan for yourself FIRST throughout the year.

Find a friend or make a new one that you can call at any hour. Don't be afraid to ask around – you might be surprised by who is willing and wanting to be that friend.

Have a backup plan if you really don't want to attend and event. For example – if your child(ren) want to go to an event, perhaps someone else can be asked to take them.

Limit intake of alcohol, foods, tobacco or other items that are often mistakenly used to mask or suppress thoughts or feelings. They will provide temporary relief at best and will have long term negative effects on healing.

Give yourself permission to feel – whatever that might be!

Special ways to remember your loved one.

Grief envelopes – write a letter and put it in an envelope under your holiday tree or at their table place setting, consider asking others to include a letter or coloured picture as well. You can choose to have them read aloud or to seal the envelope sealed. Whichever works for you.

Memory box – have everyone contribute – what is one or two memories that they have of their loved one. This can then be shared with younger generations as they age, especially if they are younger in years.

Light a candle and place it where you can see it during gatherings or at the dining table when you are by yourself.

Make a donation in memory of your loved one at special times throughout the year. It could be one organization or several different ones.

Be creative – compose a poem or music for your loved one, draw/paint a picture, take photographs, attend a pottery class.

Do an activity of remembrance - do something they use to enjoy doing– go ice skating, for a walk in the woods, feed the birds, try your hand at baking cookies – it doesn't matter what they taste or look like.

It will be different. It won't be the same- but it will be ok!

Rev. Sherry Fugard