

Controlling Holiday Anxieties

Ideally, holidays are family times, times to share warmth, love and togetherness. But if your child died during the past year, Christmas won't feel this way for you. The togetherness of Christmas makes the loss cut even deeper into your heart because your child is not there.

Anticipation of the day fills you with dread. You don't know how you'll get through it. You worry that you will spend the day with a tight throat and burning eyes from fighting back the tears, or that others will be uncomfortable because you are withdrawn into yourself with memories of Christmases past.

One of the reasons for dreading the day is that you don't know what to expect of yourself. You're afraid that you'll be out of control.

To lessen your fear and dread, decide before the holiday arrives whether you will fight back your feelings of loss and sadness or express them outwardly. Then share your decision with those with whom you will celebrate Christmas.

If you decide to keep your tears and hurt to yourself you might want to shorten the time you spend with others. This way you won't have to keep up the pretense for as long. You can postpone the tears to when you are alone. Tell that to those with whom you expect to spend the day. Because the day will be hard for you, you might want to spend most of it away from a crowd.

On the other hand, you may decide to let the tears flow and the memories surface. If this is your decision, prepare others ahead of time. Tell them that the sadness of your child's death and the memories of past Christmases will probably make you cry. Tell them also that you are likely to talk about your child quite a lot on Christmas day. Tell them that you need to do this and ask for their patience and understanding.

Although these suggestions won't take away the pain of your grief, they will give you some sense of control and help you and others to know what to expect.