



# Delta Hospice Society

*comfort, meaning, dignity and hope*

## **Coping with Special Days and Holidays**

Holidays and special events can be challenging and stressful times during the best of circumstances. They stir up memories of the past, evoke powerful feelings, and force us to compare our life situation to the past and/or to an idealized version.

Dealing with a holiday or special event after a death or loss can become even more difficult after the first year. Customary routines are ended, never to be repeated in quite the same way. Holidays can be significant, meaningful and enjoyable – and will be different.

Here are some tips:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Set reasonable expectations for yourself. Don't try to do everything and see everyone.
- Be realistic about what can and cannot be done.
- Schedule brief breaks to be alone.
- Try to tell those around you what you really need since they may not know how to help you. Ask for their understanding if you withdraw from an activity that doesn't feel like a good idea to you.
- Acknowledge to yourself that the occasion may be painful at times.
- Let yourself feel whatever you feel.
- Express feelings in a way that is not hurtful.
- Don't be afraid to rethink traditions. Keep in mind that traditions, even long-standing ones, can be changed and can be resumed next year, or not.
- Limit your time – grief is emotionally and physically exhausting.
- Take time for yourself for relaxation and remembrance.
- Honour the memory of a loved one – give a gift or donation in his or her name, light a candle, display pictures and/or share favourite stories with supportive people.
- Discuss, ahead of time with family and/or friends, what each person can do to make this time special. Share in the responsibility and see what can be eliminated or included to keep it less stressful.
- If celebrating does not feel right, try volunteering this year.
- Think about what part of this event you are not looking forward to, and discuss with other participants ahead of time, what can be done to change it.
- Remember it is okay to laugh and enjoy yourself.
- Leave an event early if you want or need to.
- Make a shopping list ahead of time and shop on a good day.
- Propose a toast to your loved one and invite people to share memories.
- Give yourself permission to cut back on holiday decorations, preparations and gift-giving.