



## **COPING WITH HOLIDAYS AND OTHER ANNUAL EVENTS**

The events that began on September 11 have made celebrating holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and other important dates a difficult time for many people, especially:

- Those who have experienced great loss;
- Survivors of crime who have been re-traumatized by the terrorist attacks;
- People who are uncomfortable celebrating when the country is at war; and
- Those who feel unsafe.

### **Helpful Suggestions:**

#### **There are no right or wrong ways to recognize and celebrate important days.**

The best way to approach important days is to find ways to make them personally meaningful while acknowledging recent events, feelings, and circumstances. It can help to think about what will make these days easier and better for you and what might make them harder.

#### **Complicated emotional responses are common and natural.**

It is normal to experience anger, resentment, guilt, and other negative responses. Cry if you need to—it's a natural and healthy expression of grief that often provides much-needed relief. Don't conceal your feelings to protect other adults, but strive to be sensitive to children's needs. Children are very aware of and influenced by the way adults express their emotions.

#### **Determine your capacity for being around people.**

Some people need to spend time alone. Others get comfort from being with other people. Select your companions carefully and spend time with those you find helpful, supportive, understanding, patient, and caring.

#### **Choose to celebrate or not.**

Some people feel they cannot celebrate, or that celebrating would be wrong. Others worry about other family members—especially children—and want to ensure they experience some joy. Try to work out what is right for you and your family.

#### **Plan for important days with family members or friends.**

Those close to you can help you cope. Include children in discussions about how the family should celebrate these days. Discuss what traditions to follow and what new ones to create. Bereaved family members should not be pressured to participate in unwanted extended family rituals.

© 2001 The National Center for Victims of Crime

2000 M Street, NW, Suite 480 ♦ Washington, DC, 20036 ♦ PH: 202-467-8700 ♦ FAX: 202-467-8701  
1-800-FYI-CALL ♦ www.ncvc.org ♦ gethelp@ncvc.org

**Celebrate in ways that are meaningful and helpful.**

You don't have to participate in all (or any) activities. Ask yourself whom you want to be with, where you want to be, and what you want to do. Don't feel obligated to send gifts or cards. If you want to buy gifts but are overwhelmed at the thought of holiday crowds, try shopping on-line or by phone.

**Maintain existing family traditions and/or create new ones.**

Some people find it helpful to maintain family traditions. Others deliberately do things differently or create new traditions. Making gifts in the memory and honor of others, finding ways to recognize and remember those lost, meditating or attending religious services, spending time with those who are alone, or volunteering and helping other people are among less traditional ways to mark the holidays.

**Take care of yourself.**

Take steps to maintain your strength and energy. Avoid unnecessary additional stresses and include activities that help decrease stress—such as taking a walk, exercising, eating well, taking a bath, starting a journal. Enlist friends and family to help with practical preparations.

**Seek professional help if needed.**

If you are concerned about burdening family and friends, or feel overwhelmed by their feelings or your own, you might find it helpful to speak to professionals like grief counselors, pastoral leaders, family doctors, or therapists.

A variety of assistance is available, including one-on-one counseling, helplines to call when feeling particularly low, or support groups of people who are having similar feelings. If you can't find help where you live, call **1-800-FYI-CALL**, the National Center for Victims of Crime Helpline, for assistance.

