

Coping During the Holidays

(NAPS)—Coping with the loss of a loved one can be difficult any time, but particularly so during the holidays. This year may be especially poignant for grieving families. Not only will they be dealing with their own loss, but also the losses suffered throughout the country.

For help managing grief during the holiday season, Vitas Healthcare Corporation, the nation's leading provider of hospice services, recommends that you begin by planning ahead.

Plan ahead for all upcoming holidays. This includes all the times that family and friends join together for fun, not just the traditional days of celebrations. Plan early and include your entire family when deciding how best to celebrate the events. Ask, do we really enjoy doing this or is it done out of habit? When planning, consider the following:

- Be realistic about what you can comfortably do to participate in the holiday. Decide if you can still handle the responsibilities held in the past. Consider shopping by phone, catalogs or the Internet. Ask friends and family for help.

- Do not be afraid to make changes. Let the children take over decorating. Open presents the night before the holiday rather than the day of. Have dinner at a different time and change the seating arrangement. Burn a special candle in honor of your absent loved one.

- Draw comfort from doing something for others. Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of your loved one. Invite a guest who would otherwise be alone to share in the celebration.

Helping Others Cope with Grief

Knowing the right thing to say to a friend coping with the loss of a loved one might seem difficult, particularly around the holidays. But, VITAS Healthcare Corporation recommends being straightforward and telling your friend that you're concerned. Other suggestions include:

- Reach out to him or her. Don't wait for your friend to call you.
- Be direct. Ask, "How are you coping?" Then be prepared to really listen.
- Encourage your friend to do what makes him or her most comfortable.
- Respect different cultures. Ask your friend what is done in his or her culture.



Next, evaluate your coping plans. Make sure that you do not isolate yourself from those who love you and can provide support. Think about what the holiday means to you and your family. Do your plans allow you to express and celebrate the aspects of the holiday that are important?

Let your plans and limits be known. Once you've made plans for the holiday, share them with friends and family. Let them know of any intended changes and explain how they can best help you through this difficult time.

Finally, don't be afraid to have fun. Give yourself and your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday. Experiencing joy and laughter does not mean that you have forgotten your loved one. Do not feel guilty over any enjoyment you experience.