

Professionally Speaking...

Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

The Holiday Dilemma

'Tis the season to be jolly....but for parents grieving the loss of their precious baby, they certainly feel anything but jolly! Department stores are adorned with festive holiday décor, and cheerful music rings in the season with songs that sometimes bring tears to the eyes of those who are mourning. Babies are seen sitting on Santa's lap in the mall, while your dreams of visits with Santa are shattered. The dilemma is that the rest of the world wants to experience joy and celebrations while you are grieving. Family and friends want everything back to normal, yet holidays "as usual" deny the loss and trivialize the life of your baby.

I'd like to offer some coping strategies as you approach the holidays:

- Be patient with yourself. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.
- Decide on a new way or a new place to spend the holidays.
- Be realistic and realize that hurting moments will come. Be ready for them and honor them, then let them go.
- Plan ahead. Prioritize what needs to be done, and decide what is really important.
- Be prepared for holiday well-wishers. Brace yourself and know that others do wish you well and that their greetings are not intended to be hurtful reminders.
- Redefine your expectations. Make a holiday checklist of things you would usually do regarding cards, decorations, shopping, and traditions. Be honest with what you expect to be able to do and don't feel guilty if you are not able to accomplish all that you had in previous years.
- Be flexible. Know that you are working through a challenging time and might have to make some changes.
- Take care of yourself physically. Eat right. Exercise. Rest.
- Screen all holiday activities and gatherings. Only attend the ones that you really want to. Have an escape plan ready. Give yourself permission to leave if you feel uncomfortable.
- Give yourself the gift of emotion. It's OK to cry, but it's also OK to laugh.
- Make shopping easier. Do what you feel you can handle. Shop on-line to avoid busy malls.
- Live through the hurt. Feel the pain – that's how you will heal. Don't allow the pain or sadness to ruin the entire season. Joy can return to your heart.

Grieving is full-time work and holidays interrupt the grieving process. If you can incorporate some of these suggestions into your holiday planning, you may feel better prepared to cope with this difficult time of year.