

HOSPICE OF THE VALLEY
Patient and Family Education

Managing the Holidays as a Caregiver

The holidays are coming! We can almost hear them, like a not-so-distant train approaching. Once the train comes into view, one car after another will arrive: Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year's, Valentine's Day and all the personal days of significance in each of our lives.

With them comes a mixture of memories, expectations and worries. How will they be this year? How much energy can we spare to make them all they can be? Will we, and others we care about, be satisfied or disappointed?

Here are some ways to confront these thoughts and feelings, and manage them the best we can:

1. Talk with others about the holidays. Air everyone's hopes and worries and be honest about your limitations this year. Call them "the 2011 holiday season" because the ways we celebrate will be unique to this year.
2. Accept the reality of difficult feelings, should they surface. We are all attached to tradition and dread the disappointment that change can bring. But disappointment is just another form of sorrow, and once feelings are accepted and expressed, they fade. If these feelings are denied or held back, it is harder to make fresh and realistic plans.
3. Make lists for each holiday: what "makes" the holiday meaningful? What can you hold on to and still get that special feeling? What can you put aside for this year so that the holiday burden is lightened for you?
4. Share the workload, asking for help with specific holiday tasks. Accept help when it is offered. Compromise when needed, just for this year.
5. Take time afterward to reflect on the experience and learn its lessons. Holidays have a way of seeming unalterable, yet we make them meaningful, and we change, so they must also change. Enjoy your holidays!

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