

# *Holidays & Hope*

SECOND EDITION

*May the spirit  
of the season  
comfort your heart*

# *Holidays & Hope*

SECOND EDITION



*May the spirit of the season  
comfort your heart*

*May the spirit of the season  
comfort your heart*



*Holidays & Hope*  
SECOND EDITION



**MADD Canada's Mission  
is to stop impaired driving and  
to support victims of this violent crime.**

This brochure has been designed to assist victims dealing with the aftermath of an alcohol or drug-related crash. It is our hope that this booklet will be of value to you and comfort during this difficult time.

Please don't hesitate to contact us  
for information or support.

**1-800-665-6233**



## *Holidays & Hope*

*Although you and your loved one will be apart  
May the spirit of the season comfort your heart  
And may its message of peace be with you each day  
To help and guide you along life's way.*

## *Handling the Holidays and Grief*

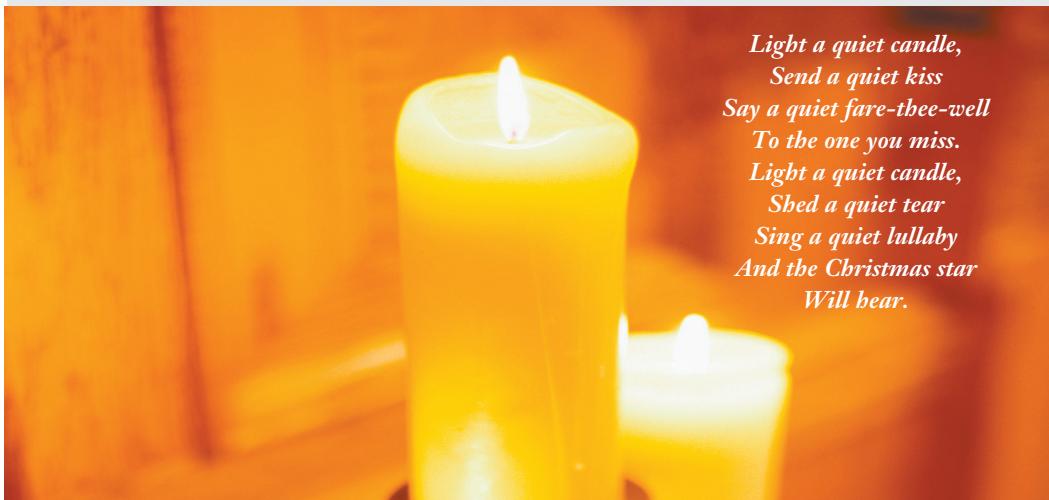
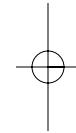
*T*he holidays are usually times of joy, family togetherness, gift giving and thankfulness. Regardless of the way we are feeling, Bing Crosby continues to sing “White Christmas” and the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. All around us everyone is in a frenzy of shopping, baking and activity.

For many people the holidays are exciting ... others find them lonely: including some retirees, the homeless, people with low self esteem, those who mistrust and the bereaved.

If someone in your life has died, the holidays may bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness. This season may actually accentuate the fact that your loved ones are no longer with you.

You may be encouraged to join in the holiday spirit, when painfully, the sounds, sights and smells may trigger the memories of your loved one. It is a time when you are faced with so many decisions.

- Do we send cards?
- Shall we put up a tree?
- Will the old traditions be too painful or should we create new plans this year?
- Do we accept dinner invitations?
- Should we visit relatives out of town?



*Light a quiet candle,  
Send a quiet kiss  
Say a quiet fare-thee-well  
To the one you miss.  
Light a quiet candle,  
Shed a quiet tear  
Sing a quiet lullaby  
And the Christmas star  
Will bear.*

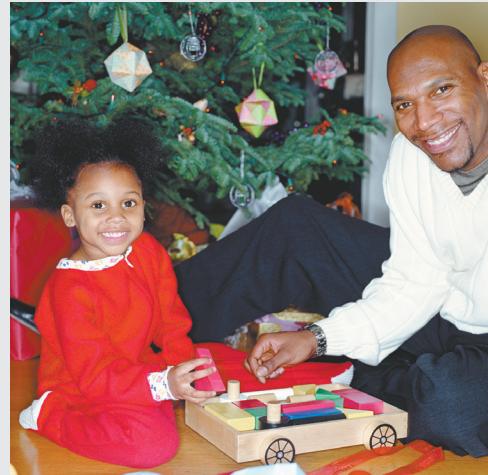


# Helping Children Cope with the Holidays

by John Kennedy Saynor

There are many factors that hinder children in their grieving process. One of the difficulties they have in dealing with their grief is that they are often discouraged from expressing it. Since the grief of a child increases the pain adults are feeling, adults avoid talking with children about their feelings.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that adults do not understand how a child grieves. This is especially true at the holiday season. The following are some points that will help children deal with the season ahead.



- Include children in any discussion about the holidays.
- It is a time of great insecurity for them, and, they need the security and support of the family.
- Include the children in any discussion of what Christmas Day will be like.
- Ask them what they want and what they don't want. It is best to know ahead of time what is going to happen rather than approach the day without any plans.
- Get the children's ideas about an appropriate gift or donation in memory of a loved one.
- Make them part of the tradition.
- Give children a break from the family.
- If they need to spend part of the holiday with their friends, let them.
- Encourage children to talk about the one who has died.

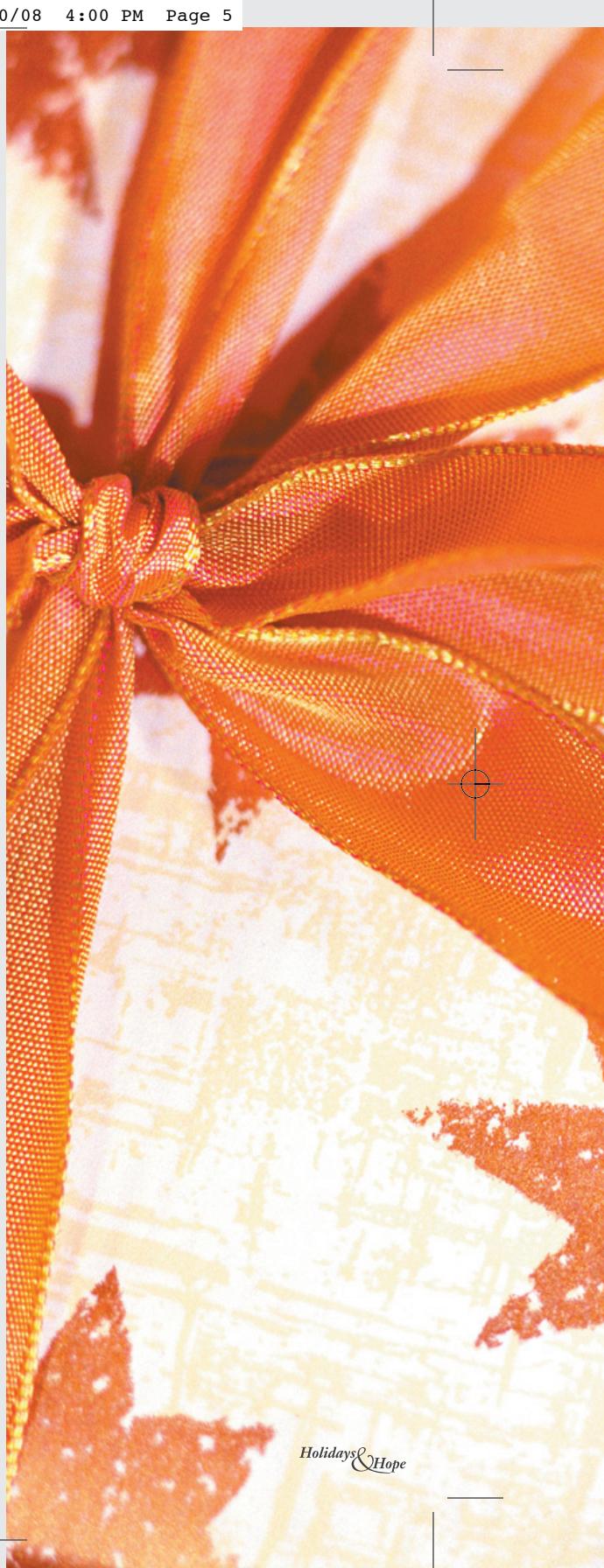
## *“Tinsel and Tears”*

*from Bereavement Magazine*

*Here are some suggestions that have proven helpful over time:*

- Anticipation is often far worse than reality. Be realistic. There will be pain, especially when there is an empty chair at the table, but don't try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.
- Plan ahead. Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important.
- Be kind and gentle to yourself. Be patient with yourself and with others. Figure out what you SHOULD do, balance it against what you are capable of doing, and then **COMPROMISE**.
- Don't be afraid to change traditional routines. For you, everything else has already changed anyway. Try whatever pops into your head. You can always scrap it if it doesn't work or if it doesn't feel quite right.
- Take care of yourself, physically. Eat right. Jog your memory!
- Hold on to your pocketbook and charge cards. You can't spend grief away, though you might be tempted to try.
- Accept social invitations according to your desire and energy. Explain to hosts that you may have to cancel at the last minute. When you do attend, leave if you must. You might say, “It's a lovely party, but I'm feeling overwhelmed by grief just now and I need to be alone for a little while”, give yourself permission to be honest.
- Try shopping on “good” days (or hours, or a few not-so-awful moments). Do what you can when you can. Smaller shops or boutiques may be less overwhelming than shopping malls. The slight additional cost can be more than worth it. Catalogues may be helpful. Sometimes a nicely wrapped big box containing a picture of the proposed gift can service until the actual shopping can be done later (when prices are usually better anyway).
- Understand that heartaches will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so too will the warm loving memories of each piece. Don't deny yourself the **GIFT OF HEALING TEARS**.

- Hang the stockings if you wish. Some families place small notes inside the stocking and read them whenever they wish. Sometimes it's easier to hang the "special" stocking in a place apart from the others. Do what feels right for you and your family.
- Consider placing a small wreath or tree at the gravesite – or donate a living evergreen tree to the park, school, place of employment or some other special place. A small one is not very expensive, and being able to watch it grow is a constant reminder of the persistence of life and memory.
- Share your holidays with someone - anyone! Visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. Do something. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring. Remember that giving to and caring for others is a healing thing to do for yourself. Be careful and responsible, but do what feels right for you.
- Buy a gift for your absent loved one, and give it away to someone who would otherwise not have a gift. It is the giving, the exchanging of love, that we miss the most. When you share love, it grows.
- Light a special candle - not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared.
- Learn to look for the joy in the moment. Learn to celebrate what you do have instead of making mental lists of what you are missing.
- Leave the word "ought" out of the holidays.



## *Help for the Holiday Season*

*By Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt*

### ***You are not alone...***

Rather than times of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

### ***Love does not end with death...***

Holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief - a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living.

### ***Talk about your grief...***

Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better.

### ***Be tolerant of your physical or psychological limits...***

Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down.

### ***Eliminate unnecessary stress...***

Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely "keeping busy" won't distract you from your grief.

### ***Be with supportive, comforting people...***

Friends and relatives who encourage you to be happy and sad, to be yourself and accept your feelings.

### ***Mention the name of the person who has died...***

If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was important in your life.

### ***Do what is right for you during the holidays...***

Friends and family who mean well often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with those closest to you.

### ***Plan ahead for family gatherings...***

Decide the family traditions you want to continue, and the new ones you would like to begin following the death of someone loved. Anticipate rather than just reacting to whatever happens.

### *Embrace your treasured memories...*

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. Holidays always make you think about times past. Memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness.

### *Renew your resources for living...*

Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of a loved one creates opportunities for taking inventory of your life - past, present and future.



## *Greeting Cards*

*H*ow hard it was to face the Christmas cards - and yet we felt the need to let those friends and relatives know of our son's death. But how to get it done? We were too exhausted to write a personal note to everyone. And then a solution occurred. We enclosed the simple little funeral service card within the already bought Christmas cards with the feeling that this was the very best solution we could offer. The response from those dear friends who wrote to offer words of hope and consolation was a rich reward."

*Bruce Conley, Handling the Holidays*

Recognizing that this idea may not seem suitable to some families, we encourage the bereaved to re-evaluate the practice of sending cards and to seek assistance from friends, to look for different and creative ways to complete the task, or to feel free to pass on this custom for this year!



## *No Easy Answers*

*There are no easy answers, but perhaps the following suggestions may be helpful:*

- Try to reach out to others in need. A donation of food, clothing, goods or your time to a needy person or cause could be done in memory of your loved one and will most certainly be therapeutic for you.
- Try to maintain your health through good nutrition, plenty of rest and some mild but stimulating exercise. Fatigue leaves the emotions raw and makes us more vulnerable.
- Talk about your loved one and talk about your grief. You'll help yourself heal if you are able to talk about the reality. Find supportive and comforting people who will recognize your needs, listen to you and help you feel understood. Share your memories. They are often a blend of happiness and will promote a sense of unity among your supporters and yourself.
- Express your faith. You may discover a renewed sense of your beliefs. Consider attending a special holiday service. Find people who understand your need to talk. Contact your clergy person.
- Planning ahead will help to eliminate fear, panic and anxiety. Weigh your options and be aware of coming events. Schedule only what you think you can handle. Do what is right for you. Attempt to eliminate all unnecessary stresses from your life.
- You are grieving now, because you once had the privilege of loving. Through these holidays DON'T GIVE UP.
- Winter is always followed by springtime. The cold desolate weather can't help but adversely affect our grieving, but rest assured that the spring's warmth will bring a renewed sense of well-being.
- Maintain hope.



*M*uch has grieved us, we cannot deny it. Strong as we are, believing as we do, we are still grieved, and we must overcome it.

To stop grieving does not mean we no longer care, but that we cannot let this emotion consume us when we need a steady hand and a firm step. It will creep back in unlikely moments to make us cry but time will replace the pain with happy memories.

Once we have a flicker of light we can know that grieving is at an end. It can no longer take our whole thought because we have things to do, places to go, and a life to live. This is the time.

*Red Jacket, Seneca*



*W*inter sunsets cut through the dense woods and light them with a thousand blazing candles. The brilliance of the last rays reaches long fingers over the dark horizon to glaze rooftops with orange and to color chimney smoke.

Down along the timberline a couple of deer paw the crusty snow and leaves in search of acorns. Excited coyote pups yip at the sight of their mother and a screech owl's voice quavers in the cold crisp air.

It is hard to be weary, hard to be angry, hard to be full of self when the land offers such peace. To see and hear natural things makes a huge adjustment seem as though it is so simple – and it is.

*Chief Joseph, Nez Perce*





# *Your Holiday Checklist*

*Check what you would traditionally do and then circle what you might want to do this year. Share this with your family or have them do one of their own and compare notes.*

### **Decorations**

- Decorate as usual
- Modify your decorations
- Ask for help
- Let others do it
- Make changes, such as: an artificial tree instead of a real one
- Have a special decoration for your loved one
- Eliminate the tree or other decorations

### **Shopping**

- Shop as usual
- Give cash
- Shop through catalogues
- Ask for help
- Shop early
- Make your gifts
- Give baked goods
- Shop with a friend
- Ask for help wrapping gifts
- Do not exchange gifts now but perhaps later
- Make a list of gifts you want before you go out

### **Dinner**

- Prepare as usual
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Eat alone
- Change time of dinner
- Change routine of dinner, such as, this year do a buffet
- Change location of dinner, eat in a different room
- Ask for help
- Cook something special to honour your loved one

### **Traditions**

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Go to an entirely new place
- Bake the usual holiday foods
- Buy the usual holiday foods
- Go to the religious services
- Do not attend religious services
- Attend the religious service but at a different time
- Attend a totally different service in a different place
- Spend quiet time alone
- Visit the cemetery
- Open gifts on Christmas eve
- Open gifts on Christmas day

### **Greeting Cards**

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Include a letter
- Elect to skip this year

### **January**

- Spend as usual
- Remove the decorations early
- Go out of town
- Avoid New Year's parties
- Attend a New Year's party
- Have a New Year's party
- Spend time with only a few friends
- Write in your journal your hopes for the new year
- Go to a movie
- Go to bed early





## *Tips on Dealing with the Holiday Blues*

Even though the holidays can be a difficult time for those who have experienced the death of a loved one, there are ways the bereaved can persevere during Chanukah, Ramadan, Christmas, Kwanzaa or a New Year's celebration. Here are some steps that we recommend:

### *Do something symbolic*

Find a unique way to remember the loved one. For example, hang a stocking, make a charitable donation, hang an ornament, put a wreath on the grave or plant a tree. Light a special candle, not in memory of the death, but in celebration of the life and love shared. These acts will help remember the loved one as the holiday celebrations proceed.

### *Be Patient*

Know that hardly anyone is as happy as we think they are. We all have hurts to bear even though in our "busyness" it may not seem so. There are lots of lonely people and charitable organizations that could use your love, care and help.

### *Think, speak and act positively*

Try to stop all negative thoughts as soon as they begin and replace them with uplifting thoughts such as "In spite of my loss, I will try to enjoy this season". Instead of accentuating the loneliness, try to focus on the opportunities to deepen existing friendships and establish new ones. Affirmative thoughts open the door to a season of hope and pleasure, not despair and pain. Joy happens when we look for it.

### *Be kind and gentle to yourself*

Figure out what you should do, balance it with what you are capable of doing and then compromise. Forgive yourself. Be realistic about the hurt, deal with it and then try to release it.

### *Examine expectations*

It is unrealistic to expect the holidays to be as memorable as those were in the past after any major life change. Families are encouraged to talk, agree and plan together on whether holiday traditions should be continued or altered after the death of a loved one. Some family members may not want to be involved in the planning, but seek their approval and input. Everything has already changed, so do not be afraid to change some traditions. You choose which ones.

***Ask for help when you need it***

Take care of yourself; eat right, get exercise and enough sleep. If holiday depression threatens to become overly oppressive, share your fears and concerns with a trusted friend. Feelings shared are feelings diminished. Do not wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it. We must do that for ourselves.

***Consider your pace, and plan ahead***

Scale back on activities to a reasonable level. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you. Don't let the season become too complicated and stressful.

***Cry***

Tears and sadness are a natural part of grieving. However, they do not have to dominate the entire holiday.

***Shop smart***

You can't buy away your grief and holiday shopping may seem intimidating and stressful. Figure out the easiest way to accomplish the task at hand. Ask a friend or relative to help pick up gifts.

***List the gifts of your loved one's life***

We give to each other many wonderful gifts ... joy, safety, laughter, companionship, etc. These treasures are evidence that we did exchange meaningful gifts, even if the giver is now gone.

***Talk about your loved one and your grief***

Share your memories. Find supportive and comforting people to listen.

***Express your faith***

Consider attending a special holiday service. Discover a renewed sense of your beliefs. Contact your clergy person.



*This is the season to remember that we once loved and were loved.  
Winter is always followed by springtime. The warmth and promise of spring will  
bring a renewed sense of well being.*



## *How Many Stockings Shall I Hang?*

*adapted from Shirley Melin*

*W*hat a torment! Funny how you worry what your friends will think. For days I worried. And finally I hung three upon the fireplace wall, and laid one gently on the mantle.

But that was last year! And this year I shall hang all four above the fireplace. For this year the confusion of the mind has found new answers - with conviction! For it does not really matter where my children live or who has recently died - this is my family - and as long as we hang the stockings, we shall hang them all....with love.

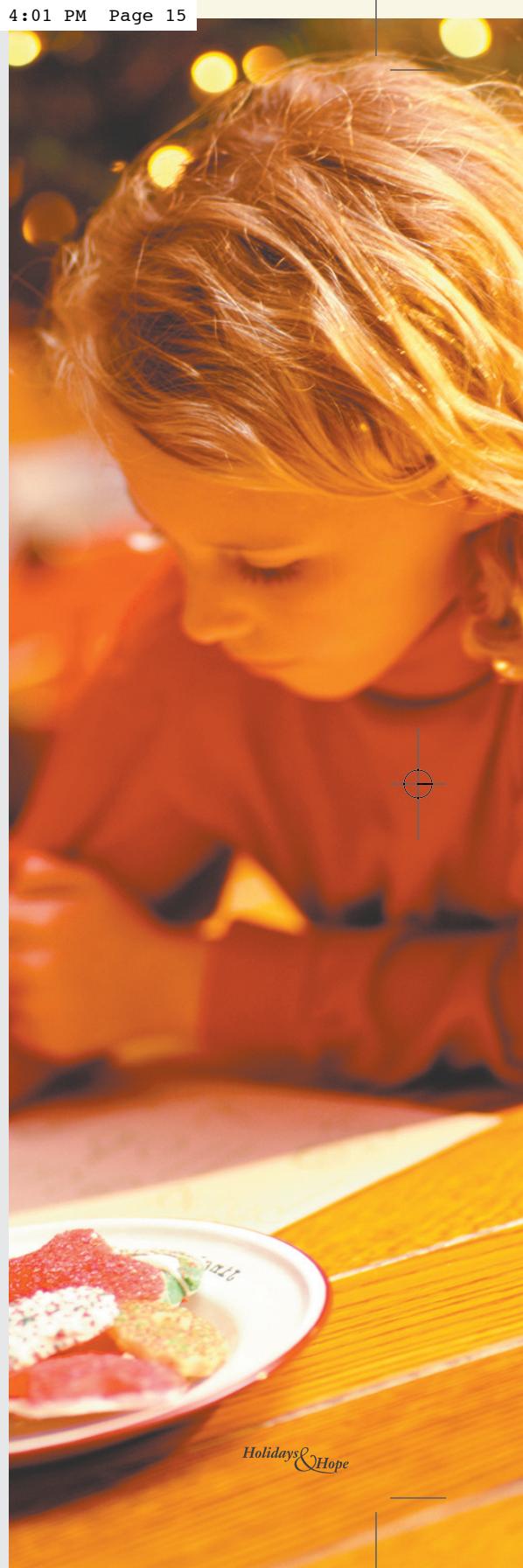
## *Coping with the Holidays*

- Plan to be with people you enjoy.
- Buy yourself something special.
- Start a new tradition.
- Consider changing the focus of your holiday celebration.  
eg. changing the time you open gifts.
- Before you make a decision to go to family celebrations, write the pros and cons of why you should or should not go. Then decide.
- Don't be afraid to express your feelings.
- Invite some friends or family to have a tree trimming evening or have them over when you take the decorations down after the holidays, as that activity can be difficult as well.
- What do you feel about the New Year this year? Talk about your hopes and apprehensions.
- Begin to plan a winter holiday - even a weekend, and focus on that at this time of year.

## *Believing in the beauty and simplicity of the holidays*

### *I commit myself to...*

- Remember those people who truly need my gifts.
- Express my love for family and friends in more direct ways than presents.
- Rededicate myself to the spiritual growth of my family.
- Examine my holiday activities in light of the true spirit of the season.
- Initiate one act of peacemaking within my circle of family and friends.
- Write a letter of appreciation saying thanks for something someone has done to make life better for me.
- Phone someone just to say hello and that I'm thinking of them.
- Do something "home-made" for someone showing that I care.
- Reach out to someone who is lonesome and take time to visit or bring a small gift.
- Say sorry to someone that I may have hurt.
- Acknowledge a struggling charity with assistance.





## *Holidays & Hope*

*Just know that there are no magical formulas to remove your suffering. It's not a choice of pain or no pain, but how you will manage the pain for that special day. Have faith that the sadness of your loss will be lessened through the hope and spirit of the holidays, through fond memories of the past, and through thoughts and prayers from friends.*







2010 Winston Park Drive, Suite 500  
Oakville, Ontario L6H 5R7  
1-800-665-MADD (6233)  
905-829-8805  
Fax: 905-829-8860

[www.madd.ca](http://www.madd.ca)  
[info@madd.ca](mailto:info@madd.ca)

Canadian Charitable Registration No: 13907 2060 RR0001