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TIPS FOR MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY

Mother's & Father's Day is celebrated in schools, workplaces, faith organizations and families throughout the country. For those whose parent or a child died, these holidays can be another painful reminder. While it is hard to escape the reminders - the greeting cards, the department store displays, and the restaurant specials - it is possible to be better prepared.

1 ANTICIPATE POTENTIAL FEELINGS

Knowing these days are coming, anticipate that feelings might be triggered such as sadness, isolation, loneliness, anger, and maybe even joy. Give yourself permission to experience these feelings when they arise. Cry if you feel like crying. Laugh if you feel like laughing. Punch a bag if you feel like punching.

2 PLAN AHEAD

Think ahead about what you want to do or not do. Who do you want to be with, and who do you not want to be with? Have a family meeting and include the children. Together develop a plan for how to spend the day. Remember, you are the expert on you and your family, so do what feels right to you.

3 EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Grief is unpredictable. It will challenge you every step of the way. People who are grieving often don't feel like themselves, or have the energy they once enjoyed. While you think you will feel one way, it could be that the opposite occurs. Be patient with yourself and willing to adjust your expectations.

4 DON'T ASSUME

Not everyone will remember that Mother's Day or Father's Day is different for your family. Let key people know what you might need or want for that day, whether it's a quiet day alone or involves some type of activity with others. Remind your child's teacher that a parent or sibling has died. Encourage teachers to ask the child what he or she wants to do or not do if there is an activity in the classroom. Then, honor the child's preferences.

5 MEMORIALIZE

Create a ritual to remember and honor your person. Ideas include visiting their grave or their favorite place; lighting a candle, or a moment of silence at a meal; playing their favorite game; or doing something to help someone else.

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6 REVISIT MEMORIES

Break out the photo album and/or video; take turns sharing favorite stories; go through valued possessions; encourage family and friends to write memories to be saved in a special box. Reminisce with others; laugh with them, and cry with them. Let them know it's okay to feel all those feelings as they remember.

7 WRITE LETTERS

Take the opportunity to write a letter addressed to them on each Mother's or Father's Day. Tell them how you feel; what you are doing; how you are growing; what you miss; what you wish for; what goals you have; in what ways the parent or child is still part of you and your life.

8 BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

This could be the most dreaded day of the year for you and filled with many different emotions. Often strong feelings erupt when least expected. Allow yourself to feel the feelings. Know that it's okay not to be okay; and it's also okay to feel good.

9 LET OTHERS SUPPORT YOU

Seek out those people in your life who are truly helpful and supportive to you. Let them know what they can do for you. Encourage them to talk with you about your child. You don't have to do this alone, unless you want to.

10 CONTINUE THE BOND

Although your person has died, your relationship continues. Find ways to continue to keep the relationship going. Share with him/her what has happened in the family; what milestones have passed; what ways he/she continues to be a part of your life; how you have continued to grow.