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Holiday Stress and Grief and Loss
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A Holiday Stress Perspective - 4 most important experiences

The authors of Unplug the Christmas Machine* recommend that the best way to have real joy and serenity in the midst of the holiday season is to stay focused on what is really most important to you and your family. The authors posit that most adults and children, after careful reflection, say they really want these four experiences at Christmas:

1. Relaxed and loving time with family (time to experience love, acceptance, fun and building memories)
2. Realistic expectations about gifts (giving gifts that are meaningful to the person; gifts within a budget-not bought on credit)
3. Evenly paced holiday time (balanced pacing of events that are freely chosen-no guilt)
4. Meaningful family traditions (religious/spiritual practices, meals, service to the community, etc.)

*authors: Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Stachel

**other good resources for holiday perspectives: aboutourkids.com; AAMFT.org; [Dr. Spock.com](http://Dr.Spock.com).

Holiday Grief and Loss

“You cannot believe you will feel better. But this is not true. You are sure to be happy again...I have had enough experience to make this statement.” Abraham Lincoln

“Now Ruby’s gone, and I must learn to let go without forgetting.” Harry Bernstein, Time Magazine, 2003

The most important aspect of dealing with holiday grief is allowing yourself to be human; allow yourself to grieve the loss of your loved one. Working through the loss of a love one can take 1-3 years. Many people, especially during the holidays, believe they have to be “full of joy” and strong and “not ruin it for everyone else”. I encourage people to have the strength and courage to feel their feelings of sadness, loss, and emptiness: doing so honors your own humanness and the depth of love you felt for the person you lost.

The second most important aspect of the grief process is grounded in the following wisdom: “you alone can do it, but you don’t have to do it alone.” Allow yourself to get support from other family members, friends, church groups and grief groups. Place yourself in the company of people who will encourage and support you as you integrate the loss of your loved one—and as you slowly put your life together in a new and meaningful way. If you would like to benefit from the support of a grief group, call Saint Mary’s chaplain’s office for details on a free, supportive professionally facilitated group.

The third important aspect of healthy grieving is intelligent self-care; do the things that nurture your body, mind and spirit.