

Dos and Don'ts for bereaved parents at Christmas

Written by parents for parents

✓ DO

- ✓ **Do** think about having a simpler meal if you can't face cooking.

- ✓ **Do** find a special way of remembering your son or daughter and put aside time for this.

- ✓ **Do**, if you have surviving children, ask them what they would like to do.

- ✓ **Do** light a candle in memory of your child, if you'd like to.

- ✓ **Do** send an early Christmas letter or note instead of cards.

- ✓ **Do**, when signing cards, find a way to include your son or daughter, maybe by adding kisses representing all your family members.

- ✓ **Do** think about hanging a new decoration somewhere special each year.

- ✓ **Do** buy presents early, possibly throughout the year, if you can't face the shops.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ **Don't** feel you have to carry on with the same routines.

- ✗ **Don't** be afraid of feeling upset as you share traditions which would normally bring you joy. Setting aside a specific time to allow emotion can be really helpful.

- ✗ **Don't** feel you must cook a traditional dinner.

- ✗ **Don't** send any Christmas cards at all if you don't want to.

- ✗ **Don't** feel you have to stay at home – why not go somewhere different?

- ✗ **Don't** be afraid to tell your friends and family what support you need.

- ✗ **Don't** feel guilty about giving money or vouchers instead of presents.

- ✗ **Don't** feel you have to be on your own.

- ✗ **Don't** be pressured into feeling you have to do anything, or that you must do certain things. Remember you only have to do as much as you want to.

✓ DO

- ✓ **Do**, to avoid the shops at Christmas, buy presents online, or give a list to a friend to get them for you.
- ✓ **Do** accept any offers of help, and don't feel like a failure for doing so.
- ✓ **Do** try to find time to spend with your closest friends – those people with whom you feel safe to cry, laugh and share memories together.
- ✓ **Do** try to spend at least a short time just as a family to allow each person to remember or share something about how they feel.
- ✓ **Do** feel free to change your family traditions, even years on – it's never too late to do something different.
- ✓ **Do** spend some time writing down or typing out how you feel and what you would like to say to your son or daughter – expressing yourself can be very cathartic.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ **Don't** pretend that everything is normal.
- ✗ **Don't** feel you 'should' be doing better – it may have been ten years, but that's only ten Christmas days.
- ✗ **Don't** worry if you feel it is all a total disaster. It is 12 months before it all happens again. There is time to think, talk to others and learn some new strategies which will hopefully make next year a little easier.
- ✗ **Don't** feel you have to be with other people if you don't want to.
- ✗ **Don't** overdo it!

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