



# INSIGHT

A Newsletter for the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition  
December 2011, Volume 1, Issue 1

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR...

Welcome to Volume 1, Issue 1. For the next issue, there will be legislative, district and statewide news. This will be a quarterly newsletter. I can provide the legislative and some statewide news, but in order for this newsletter to work, I need your district news like Garrett Lee Smith, training and fundraising activities. Not only will it be in the newsletter, but Terry can then update each district on the website. The 10th annual Day at the Capital will be February 16, 2012. Note the date change. There will be news about table setup, press conference, etc through the list-serv and website. If you are interested in joining the list

serv, send me an email at [gatorjudy2@gmail.com](mailto:gatorjudy2@gmail.com) and I will see that you get added.

### The 10th Annual Day at the Capital

Thursday, February 16, 2012  
Note the date change and mark your calendars

## Managing the Holidays

By Donna Watson Lawson

Reprinted from December, 2005 issue of Solace

It's that time of year. "The Holidays" draw near once again. And for those of us who have experienced the death of a loved one to suicide, we await the holidays with mixed emotions. We are fearful that we will be overcome by unmanageable feelings of sorrow and loss, or by an exacerbation of accompanying feelings of anger or of guilt. We dread potentially uncomfortable social situations such as parties and gatherings attended by insensitive persons. We desire positive memories of past holidays shared with our deceased loved ones, yet we worry that joyful memories will become painful ones. As we are assailed with invitations by loving friends and family, we feel confused and torn. We do not wish to hurt others in our decision-making, yet we know we must also protect and care for ourselves. How can we plan for the approaching holidays in a manner that will lead to the highest

probability that we will have calm and peaceful, warm and loving observances?

To ensure the least pain and the highest probability of joy during the holidays, it is important for us to actively plan for the holidays. We must be introspective, examining ourselves - our current emotional state, our strength and stamina (both physical and emotional) - and plan accordingly. If we are feeling particularly fragile, we may wish to limit our activities. If we are feeling strong and positive, we may wish to plan new activities. But we must always remember that there is no "right way" to observe the holidays. There may be old ways, old traditions, that felt right in the past, but, as we have learned, what was right and what felt right "before" may no longer feel right or be right for us now. We must navigate slowly and carefully as we continue our journey through the holiday season.

Following are some suggestions for how to survive the holiday season, whether your grief is young or you have been living with it for some time. Each suggestion may not work for you - in fact none of the suggestions may work for you. But pondering the suggestions provided below may trigger thoughts and ideas of what will work for you.

- Discuss your feelings with family members. Address the desires and concerns of persons involved in previous holiday gatherings and celebrations. Expect that there may be differences in desires, and be prepared to talk through each person's feelings.

- Make your feelings known to those who are close to you. Friends and family cannot be sensitive to your wishes if they do not know what they are.

- Expect that there will be pain. Knowing that pain is unavoidable to some extent can allow you to accept it when it arises and to move on.

- If holiday celebrations previously took place in your home or you previously were responsible for planning or creating the holiday activities, e.g., decorating, cooking, shopping, etc., give yourself permission to pass on such involvement this year. Someone else can accept responsibility for cooking and cleaning and decorating.

- Should you desire to continue to be actively involved in traditional holiday activities, consider scaling them down this year, e.g., invite fewer people, hire a caterer and/or a cleaning service, buy sweets from a bakery instead of baking them yourself, etc.

- Give yourself permission if necessary to refrain from attending holiday gatherings, whether of friends or of family. It may be too painful to be with others in such a setting this year.

- Should you decide to attend holiday gatherings, consider taking your own car instead of riding with others. That way you can leave if feelings become overwhelming and you need to "escape."

- Determine if there are those with whom you feel close and comfortable and with whom you can spend time alone or in small groups during the holidays. While escape is sometimes desirable, continuing to connect with others and being around others who can support you is also important. Perhaps these individuals can help you create new holiday traditions. Perhaps you can spend time with them even if there are no "holiday accouterments" present and no new holiday traditions are created. A quiet meal at home or out might suffice.

- Create new holiday traditions or rituals that include the memory of your loved one. For example, create a time during gatherings for family and friends to share memories of your loved one; Hang a Christmas stocking and ask others to write down a special memory that can be placed in the stocking and read together at an appointed time; Plant a poinsettia, a small Christmas tree, or other type of plant on the grave at Christmas; Hang a wreath on the grave marker; Create Christmas tree ornaments that celebrate the life of the loved one - perhaps including photographs; Leave an empty plate at the table in honor of your loved one; Light a candle in memory of the person who died.

- Go away during the holidays. Choose a place that you've never been, that will not have inherent in it memories of your loved one that might be difficult to handle -Or travel to some place that was important to you and your loved one, some place that will bring you good memories, joyful memories.

- Change your routine - Attend religious services at a different time and/or attend a different church or synagogue; Host the holiday meal at a restaurant instead of at home; Have a holiday dinner instead of a luncheon; Serve the holiday meal as a buffet instead of a sit-down meal; Serve the meal in a different room; Open presents Christmas Eve instead of Christmas day, or vice versa.

- Don't let yourself be overly sensitive to the normal

actions of people during the holiday season. It is natural for people to wish each other Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, and Happy New Year. Most people would be distressed to know that their words or actions had inadvertently hurt you. Try not to feel hurt if someone's words are unwittingly painful.

• Shop by mail or over the internet to avoid the commercialism and forced gaiety of the retail establishment during the holiday season. If you must go out, shop early.

• Do something for someone else during the holidays - Visit someone in a nursing home or hospital; Collect toys for needy children; Cook a meal at the local homeless shelter; etc.

• Cry when you feel like it - without feeling embarrassed, no matter where you are when the tears arrive! Laugh if you feel like it - without feeling guilty!

• Talk about your loved one if you wish. Spend time

with friends or family members who will allow you to share memories, and who will share their memories as well.

• Attend religious services. Use the occasion to find solace in your beliefs. In many communities various churches and synagogues have special holiday services dedicated to the memory of loved ones who have died. Consider attending one of these holiday memorial services.

Holiday times can be very draining physically and emotionally, even during the best of times. Spend time alone with yourself, at home, outdoors, in a house of worship, etc. Be gentle with yourself. Give yourself permission to feel, whether you are feeling grief, sadness, anger, joy, etc. Take care of yourself physically - eat well and sleep well. And, importantly, monitor yourself and be flexible, prepared to make on-line changes to plans if necessary.

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FLORIDA SUICIDE PREVENTION COALITION  
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DONATIONS:  
Make check payable to FSPC and mail to  
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*If you or someone you know, is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress, please reach out for hope by calling:*

**1-800-273-8255 (TALK)**  
*24 hours a day; 7 days a week*