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Honoring the memory of a loved one during the holidays can offer the gift of peace. Sometimes family and friends aren't quite sure what will hurt or help you. So, they are reluctant to nudge your grieving heart. Here are ideas for you to invite family and friends to share your grief and ways they can acknowledge your loss by participating in your plans.

TEN WAYS TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF A LOVED ONE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

1. Play Secret Santa. It's likely the bereaved person will be missing out on opening a present on Christmas Day, a tradition their loved one handled. With other family or friends, purchase small gifts, wrap, and place them in a big sock, or bag. You could also make coupons for "tasks" you will do or places you will go with them. Deliver it to their doorstep early Christmas morning. It's a wonderful way to brighten their day and let them know they are not forgotten. (A friend of our son, Chad, did this for us many years ago. I will never forget it.)

2. Make It a Memory Box Moment. If you haven't created a Memory Box yet, use this holiday to do that. Search through your loved one's memorabilia and find items he or she saved that were important. At a gathering, open the Memory box and share the story of the items.

3. Caption This. Find a picture of the person who died (if possible, with you in it). Create a simple greeting card and include a humorous caption or a notable quote. Send this instead of a traditional greeting card. (I'm doing that this year in place of a traditional holiday card.)

4. Decorate a Theme Tree with new and different ornaments than you've never hung before. Ask family or friends when you gather to bring a "theme" item to hang on the tree. (We created an angel, bell, star, white and gold tree the first Christmas after our son's death.)

5. Create a Christmas Trivia all about your Loved One. This can be a serious trivia pursuit or one full of laughter and fun. Make up questions, that only you know (host) or have selected as your favorite answer. And let the fun begin. Use silly ideas such as: "If Gary added a ninth



reindeer to Santa's herd, what would be his name?" Or a real idea such as: "Of the following which was Gary's favorite Christmas cookie?" Prize for the person who had the most right.

6. Wrap Up a Memory: As you sort through your loved one's belongings, find something that you feel connects the person you are giving it to with the person who died. Write a short note explaining your choice. (I did this for a small family Celebration of Life gathering. It was emotional and loving at the same time.)

7. Create a Toast in his/her honor making an alcoholic or non-alcoholic cocktail that you dreamed up. Then, name it after your loved one. Make it a tradition to begin the holiday meal with it year after year. (You could also make a side dish on entrée instead.)

8. Visit a Place they loved. Pick a local restaurant, park, museum, hiking trail, or any other place your loved one spent time. Ask everyone to assemble there. Celebrate with tailgate food, or order from a menu. Or serve champagne or hot cocoa to honor the occasion. Sing Carols. Give Hugs. Feel the spirit of love.



9. Reserve a Chair at the Table. Place a fresh bouquet of flowers on a chair at the table with a sign that reads: "Reserved for someone in heaven who is always present at our table."

10. Random Acts Quest in memory of your loved one. At your gathering, ask each person to "do" a random act of kindness in memory of your loved one. Assign a completion date and have them report back on that date of what they did. Share the stories and reactions.



Don't Forget Small Children

1. Create a Paper Chain Garland for the tree.

On each loop of the chain, write a word that your child would use to describe someone loved who died. What a keepsake for the years ahead!

2. Find and Name a Holiday Mascot. With all the cute stuffed animals in the stores during the holidays, ask the child to pick one that their special someone loved who died would have liked. Name it. Make it have a special place at the gathering table or somewhere else in the room for this year and in the future.

3. Send a Letter to Santa. Help the child write a letter to Santa explaining how they will miss their loved one this year. Ask Santa to be kind and give a special gift in his or her memory to a child in need.

