

Supporting a bereaved child during a special occasion



The absence of a someone significant who has died can be felt all the more acutely when special occasions such as anniversaries, birthdays, religious holidays, Father's Day and Mother's Day come around.

A family-focused occasion like Christmas can be particularly difficult, but don't be tempted to ignore it or play it down: providing children with the sort of traditional Christmas they enjoyed before bereavement is part of maintaining the routine that will help them cope with their loss.

Where possible, involve children in planning for the occasion and talk to them about how best they feel it should be marked. A special occasion when all the family is together provides an opportunity to talk about the person who died, share happy memories of them and talk about the grief you are all feeling.

If you do have a plan on how the day should be marked, try not to be too rigid about it - allow for flexibility and change depending on how the child may be feeling on the day. Encourage togetherness, but respect the child's wishes if they choose to cope with the difficulty by spending time alone to simply watch television, listen to music or read. Let the child know they can change their mind and join in later.

The following suggestions are designed to support the whole family during a special occasion or significant date:

- Ensure the child's network – school, nursery, child minder, etc. – is aware of significant dates so they can support if the child is upset or unsettled in the run up to the day.
- Be honest with the child about your own feelings about the loss – it is OK to cry in front of your child. This openness may encourage them to be more open about their own emotions.
- You may wish to set a place setting or write a card to acknowledge the space left around the table.
- Choose an activity to do together on the day of a special occasion to help remember the special person who has died.
- At a time when the family comes together to enjoy a meal together, consider serving their favourite meal or dish. The food can provide an opportunity to remember them and share happy memories of their significant person.



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