**CHOOSE
COMMUNICATE
COMPROMISE**

For those who are grieving, special days such as holidays and anniversaries associated with the deceased can be especially hard. Acknowledging the challenge of facing these days does not make a potentially difficult time any easier, but preparing for them by tapping into helpful coping strategies may provide some much-needed comfort.

Follow these “three Cs” recommended by HFA Senior Vice President of Grief Programs, Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv, to help navigate your way through a holiday, anniversary, or any day when grief is especially intense.

**CHOOSE**

On anniversaries and during the holidays, it can be easy to feel obligated to be a part of activities or events that have the potential to increase your pain. Remember that you have choices. Decide what activities you want to be part of, who you want to be with, and what you want to do.

After her husband died, June was invited—and felt pressured—to join her sister-in-law for Hanukkah celebrations. She decided that she would retain the freedom to choose where she wanted to be until that morning. “I never know how much energy I’ll have or how I’ll feel until that day,” she explained. She decided to eat dinner with a few women she knew through a widow’s support group and chose to go to her sister-in-law’s house for dessert.

Choosing personal ways to recognize and acknowledge the person who has died may help bring a positive focus to your grief. Lighting a candle, creating a ritual, placing a memento on a tree, holding a moment of silence, or giving a toast are some simple ways to acknowledge the losses felt so deeply, especially on holidays and anniversaries

**COMMUNICATE**

Discussing your choices with others is important, as their ways of dealing with grief may be different. June, for example, talked with her sister-in-law, explained her feelings, and asked if she could make a decision that day. Once her sister-in-law understood June’s feelings and needs, she understood the need for flexibility.

Communicating about your choices can be especially important around holidays and other special occasions as there may be long-standing traditions or expectations involved. The Smith family, for example, had a long discussion about how to handle the Christmas tree following the death of one of their children.

**COMPROMISE**

Each person deals with loss in his or her own particular way and therefore has different needs. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Leaving space for compromise is important. For example, some people in the Smith family saw the Christmas tree as an important tribute to their late son and brother. Other family members felt it was disrespectful.

The family was able to talk through each point of view and decided to have a small tree — not in the main living room, but in the family room. Those who wanted to help decorate were welcome, but those who chose not to would also be respected.

Nothing changes the fact that holidays, anniversaries, and other special days can be especially difficult while grieving. But if you choose your actions, communicate your choices to others, and find suitable compromises, you may find that they become bearable and that you have renewed strength and hope.

Adapted from Journeys with Grief: A Collection of Articles about Love, Life and Loss,edited by Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D., MDiv., copyright Hospice Foundation of America, 2012.