6 Ways to Survive the Holidays without your Child

By Angela Miller

For a bereaved parent, this time of year might not be the season of Yuletide-cheer it once was. Your eggnog might taste like crap even if it is homemade. The lights and Lords-a-leapin’ might have lost their luster. The whole season might feel like a cruel, sick joke. Worse yet, you might feel like the only person who has one or more missing from your holiday table.

The anxiety of the looming holidays can be downright debilitating. Surviving it can often feel virtually impossible. Guess what? That’s perfectly ok. Not easy, but it’s ok to allow it to be exactly what it is—nothing more and nothing less. If you feel like shit, allow it. Though repugnant, this is your new holiday reality. For now.

You certainly don’t have to like it. It’s also possible you might need some new traditions and tools to help you survive. Here is the good news: there are compassionate souls ready and willing to offer their open arms, shoulders to cry on, and hard-earned wisdom, to help you navigate the emotional landmines of the holidays. Seek the support of these gentle and loving hearts often.

Keep in mind, none of this is simple or “easy” to do. Nothing post-loss is. In fact, oftentimes it is excruciatingly difficult, and might feel more like torture and a whole lot of ‘Bah! Humbug!’ than ‘Happy Holidays!!!’

Just remember all you have to do is survive, and you get to decide how you’ll best do that. People will probably forget that it’s your job, and not theirs, so you might have to gently remind them. That your heart is the one that is broken beyond repair.

Here is what has helped me survive the holidays these past six years as a bereaved parent.
Keyword: survive.

6 Ways to Survive the Holidays Without Your Child:

1). Practice sensational self-care. Give yourself permission to take good care of yourself. You deserve it. And you need it. Trust me. Treat yourself as you would a physically wounded person with deep, visible, bleeding wounds. Just because emotional wounds are invisible, doesn’t make them less debilitating, or less real. Remember that. Remind your loved ones of this too. Treat yourself extra gently this time of year—like the carefully marked packages that read, Fragile: handle with care. More than that, be proactive. Have a plan to give yourself the gift of good self-care all season long.
2). Remove all expectations. Free yourself to participate in as little or as much holiday hoopla as you’d like. Forget about everyone’s expectations, especially yours and people who might not understand your pain. Adjust your expectations to be realistic with what is. Keyword: realistic. This year might look much different than last year, so adjust accordingly with what you can handle right now, as you are, in this moment. As hard as it might be, try not to compare what you are able to do this year with anyone else, including past versions of yourself. Yes, I know. So. painfully. hard. But try to do it anyway. Be realistic, radically kind, and oh-so-loving with yourself.

3). Just show up (or not.) Allow yourself to change locations, holiday traditions or defy social norms. Allow yourself to show up, or not. Here’s the thing: nothing is “normal” anymore. Normal died the day your child did. Which means you’re now living in the land of defying normal. Anything goes. Give yourself permission to do what you need to do this year, even if it seems “abnormal” or outlandish to yourself or anyone else.

Allow yourself the “5 minute rule,” where you decide 5 minutes before an event if you can make it or not. Communicate this with your host beforehand. Thank them for the invitation, and let them know you’re not sure if you’ll be able to make it, but if you’re up to it, you’ll be there. That alone might feel liberating and more do-able. Less pressure, and the freedom to honor what you need in that moment.

Laugh when you need to laugh; cry when you need to cry; let yourself wallow if you need to wallow. Don’t worry about what anyone else thinks. They’re not in survivable mode, you are. Staying in bed until the holidays pass, or ditching town altogether are all completely acceptable options. Think outside the box, and don’t be afraid to do something completely different that shakes up all expectations. And possibly your Great Aunt Bertha. What worked in the past might not work now, and that’s perfectly okay. Sometimes a change of scenery is exactly what’s needed to survive the holidays without your precious child.

4). Honor your child in ways that are meaningful to you. Keyword: meaningful to you. Light a candle at your holiday table in loving memory of your precious child. Say your child’s name. Ask others to do the same. Acknowledge the glaringly empty chair. Participate in random acts of kindness in loving memory of your precious child gone too soon. Donate your favorite grief book to your local library, church, hospital, grief center, therapist’s office, or to someone who needs it. Volunteer at an orphanage. Volunteer right in your neighborhood. Or, one of my all-time favorites: donate gifts for children who are the exact same age your child would be.

No matter what you choose to do, spread hope and help others, even if you don’t feel like you have much to give. Whatever you give will be multiplied, and it will be more than enough. After all, the true gift is in the giving, especially in the midst of deep grief.

5). Feel your feelings, no matter how messy they are. Give yourself ample space to feel however you feel, including opposite emotions at the same time. You might feel hopeful and defeated; joyful and sorrowful; happy and sad; grateful and not; angry and peaceful. And all of these emotions might be even more amplified during the holidays. A wise person once told me that being able to hold space for contradictory emotions at the same time is a sign of extraordinary emotional maturity. It’s true. You’re not crazy— even though it may feel like it— you’re extraordinary. Remind yourself of this often.

Especially every time you feel ripped apart at the
Memorial
This was written by our face painter after our Strides for SIDS event last summer, Beth Gordon

I thought they would want unicorns, spider man masks. Something worthy of Van Gogh or at least the professional face-painter at the parish fish fry. I practiced on my hand all week. Trying to steady the shaky lines to create a butterfly with layers of color and movement, you might think for a moment it was real and hold still to keep it from flying away. When my children were younger I could turn the whole neighborhood into a band of pirates, Japanese princesses, floppy eared dogs and sweaty faced cheetahs.

Fifteen years later and I’ve lost my touch. Didn’t sleep the night before knowing that my vague flowers and shooting stars would disappoint. But what they wanted was for me to write names across their skin. Just below their eyelashes, or spread out across their forearm. The names of babies brought into their homes and loved. The names of brothers and sisters, cousins and neighbors who they thought would grow up with them, riding bikes, trick-or-treating, birthday parties with clowns, cake and ice cream, and face painters. Just the name, they said, and an occasional matching heart. They didn’t ask me for anything I that I couldn’t give.

Monthly Infant Loss Groups
Listed below are regular meeting times in each region. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. Please call to confirm time and location. Family members and friends are encouraged and welcome to attend.

Eastern Region
St. Louis
3rd Monday of the month at 7pm
7204 Forsythe, Parish Center
St. Louis, MO 63105
1st Friday of the month at 10:30am
SiDS Resources’ office
1120 S. 6th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104
Call Dawn at 800-421-3511

Western Region
Kansas City
4th Wednesday of the month at 6pm
Call Pete at 816-569-6956 for group location

South Central/SWest Region—Springfield area
Call Sara at 573-364-5900
If you want to connect with others who have experienced the sudden death of a baby, please consider joining our Yahoo group. This internet support group is open only to families involved with SIDS Resources—no one else has access to this discussion board. You may share something about your child, your experience, or ask questions. Please email Sara at stamburrino@sidsresources.org and request to participate in the Yahoo group.

Quarterly Update
Holidays 2016
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2016 Event photos from Strides for SIDS (St. Louis) and Strike Out SIDS (KC)

Ways you can help

SIDS Resources’ Wishlist

• Display Boards
• Copy Paper
• Envelopes
• Pocket folders – blue
• Survival Guides
• Printing services

As you do your holiday shopping, please remember that you may support SIDS Resources through the Amazon Smile program. It is very easy to do! Just log in using our unique link: http://smile.amazon.com/ch/43-1344645
A portion of your purchases will support SIDS Resources! Thanks in advance!
Regional Activities

for SIDS Resources’ event information, visit www.sidsresources.org and click on “get involved”

Eastern Region
St. Louis

Candle Lighting
Sunday, Dec. 4th, 4-6pm
Kirkwood United Methodist Church, Kirkwood, MO
We realize you may not have received this e-newsletter in time, but hope you had previous notification. If not, please notify us.

Western Region
Kansas City

Candle Lighting
Thursday, Dec. 15th, 7pm
County Club United Methodist Church, Kansas City, MO
contact Pete Potts for details: ppotts@sidsresources.org

South Central/SWest Region – Springfield

Holiday Memorial
Date to be determined
In-person or via phone call are options—please contact Sara Tamburrino at 573-364-5900 or stamburrino@sidsresources.org

Quarterly Update Holidays 2016
SIDS Resources Program Staff:

**Eastern Region – St. Louis**
314-241-7437
Lori Behrens, LCSW, Executive Director
lbehrens@sidsresources.org

Dawn Casey, Family Support Program Coordinator
dcasey@sidsresources.org

Valerie Phillips, Crib Program Coordinator
vphillips@sidsresources.org

Benetta Ward, Outreach Coordinator
bward@sidsresources.org

**Western Region – Kansas City**
314-241-7437
Cheryl Herzog Arneill, MSW, Community Educator
carneill@sidsresources.org

Pete Potts, Program Coordinator
ppotts@sidsresources.org

Melissa Merriam, Development Coordinator
mmerriam@sidsresources.org

**South Central/SWest Region – Springfield**
573-364-5900
Sara Tamburrino, Program Coordinator
stamburrino@sidsresources.org

This publication is published quarterly—Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. We won’t be mailing the updates, however all updates are available online, or we can email it to you, which helps us realize significant cost savings.

If you don’t have internet access or email, please contact your Program Coordinator and we’ll work to make other arrangements. We appreciate your understanding.

If for any reason you would like to be removed from this mailing, please call 800-421-3511 or email Lori at lbehrens@sidsresources.org

To access support services for bereaved families, or to schedule a SIDS training for professional and community groups, please call 800-421-3511 or contact your regional SIDS Resources’ office.

www.sidsresources.org