

Parents of Missionaries – Tips for Getting Through the Holidays

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Tips for Getting Through the Holidays

All change involves loss. Separation from loved ones involves loss. When missionaries leave for the field and are sent off with celebration and rejoicing, their parents experience a mixture of pride and loss that may not be observed or understood. Here are some suggestions to help parents of missionaries cope with holidays.

1. Plan ahead to avoid exhaustion, which accentuates all other feelings of sadness or loss. How could you simplify Christmas this year?
2. Giving up the common expectation that throughout life we would be able to enjoy our adult children and our grandchildren is a loss, and losses must be grieved. Try to identify where you are in the grieving process.
3. Let go of the "oughts" of the season, including how you "ought" to feel. Just be yourself. It's normal to experience distress in the face of loss.
4. Brainstorm ways you can insure adequate personal and emotional support for yourself throughout the holidays. Some examples: Schedule personal "down time" throughout the season. Find a close friend who is willing to listen without judging. Have some extra "God time." Plan a new kind of holiday activity and invite others to join you.
5. Identify interpersonal issues within your family that need to be addressed before the holidays in order to prevent unwanted tensions.
6. Clarify your personal expectations about the holidays and communicate those to family members in advance to avoid misunderstanding, surprises, and disappointments. Learn the expectations of others. Find mutually agreeable solutions.
7. List all the good new things God has provided even as you have had to endure the absence of loved ones on the mission field.
8. List all the good things you can think of about having an adult child in missions.
9. Locate other parents of missionaries in your area. Work out a plan to stay in contact, even once a week, during the holidays. If possible, plan to attend together one event that everyone would enjoy.
10. Find new ways to include your missionary children and grandchildren in your celebration or to be a part of theirs. Make your own "books on tape" for grandchildren, write and send an email "journal" about holiday preparations and activities, open gifts together while on the phone, learn to send digital photos, invite your children's friends to join your celebration. Think creatively and plan ahead.

Source: David Mays, *Stuff you need to know about Doing Missions in Your Church* a CD of missions resources for local churches, produced by ACRM March 2004. Link: www.davidmays.org