



Grief and the Holidays

Virtual Workshop | Saturday, Nov. 20th, 2021

Every individual deserves the opportunity to grieve in a supportive and understanding environment. Grief is a normal, healthy reaction to loss. Within each individual is the natural capacity to heal, and the duration and intensity of grief are unique for each individual.

Some guidelines to help make our time together successful:

- ***Respect for others is key to our experience together.*** Everyone's grief has similarities, but also is unique. Everyone has their own personal beliefs, sense of meaning and spirituality. Please do not impose your views on another, including as "advice giving". There is no right or wrong in grief. We will all use caution not to interrupt one another and to be tolerant of differences.
- ***Share Airtime.*** It is important that each person is allowed time to share their feelings. Please do not monopolize all of the group time. If you are in need of more time for processing your grief, please discuss with me options for individual grief counseling support.
- ***Every person has the right to "pass"*** and not share during our time, with the exception for check in at the start of our time together. The workshop time will be shared between processing experiences/personal sharing and a class-like presentation discussing coping strategies for this time of year.
- ***Please do not compare losses.*** One loss is not greater than any other. All grief is valid.
- ***Please avoid distractions while attending this workshop.*** Avoid use of phones/tablets/other devices while we are together, and avoid any side work. "Fidgets" that provide calming are okay as long as you are maintaining engagement in our time together.
- ***Take care.*** We will not have a "break" during this workshop, but you are welcome to take care of your needs as they arise (stepping away for a moment, getting water, use of the restroom – just please don't "take us with you" 😊).
- ***Please respect the privacy and confidentiality of all other attendees.*** It is expected that all individuals attending this workshop will be mindful not to share personal or identifying information about other attendees of the group out of mutual respect. Please also be mindful of space/distance/privacy from any other persons in your home while attending this workshop virtually so as not to have any fellow attendees overheard by persons not attending the workshop. If you have headphones, it is encouraged to use them.
- ***Specifics for the Virtual Platform:*** please be on camera if possible so that we can see each other and know who else is in the "room" with us. We will identify ourselves and do a brief "check-in" to start. Please try to state your name when you speak (especially if you are not on camera) and try to use each other's names when speaking to one another. It can be helpful to mute your microphone when you aren't speaking (especially if there's any background noise in your space).



Grief and the Holidays

Crucial Self-Care Tips

1. Be Aware of Your Feelings.

Grief comes in a variety of emotions, all of which can be particularly sensitive during holidays. Self-awareness can help with navigating the present moment. It's okay to feel sad, mad, irritable, and it is okay to feel happy. Name what you are feeling, and honor that feeling.

2. It is Okay to Say "No".

Be cautious not to overwhelm yourself with social or familial obligations, it can be easy to do during this time of year. It's okay to give yourself permission not to host an event (even if you've "always done it before"). If you're not feeling up for going to a holiday party/get together/tradition/service/Zoom call, give yourself permission to say no if you need to. In doing so, you are taking care of yourself.

3. Be Gentle With Yourself

You don't have to love this holiday season. The holidays throw us off our routines, and grief can be compounded. Try to find grace with yourself and maintain basic personal needs such as eating, drinking enough water, and resting. **Meet yourself where you are at.**
"Sometimes it's OK if the only thing you did today was breathe" (Yumi Sakugawa).

4. Ask for Support

If you're struggling, don't be afraid to reach out to safe people in your life for support. It can be helpful to think ahead about who your support people are so that you can have them on "speed-dial" if needed.

5. Plan an Exit Strategy

Sometimes our tolerance is lower when we're grieving during this time of year, and it can be helpful to have some autonomy when you feel obligated to go to an event that you may not have the energy to be present for. If you go to an event, maybe drive yourself so that you can leave when you need to. If you go and can only muster staying for a few minutes, give yourself credit for going! It takes strength and bravery to do that. Give yourself credit for the accomplishment of going, and for listening to yourself and taking care of your needs when it's time to go.

6. Permission to Change a Tradition

Normal has been turned upside-down. It would make sense then that holiday traditions also are "upside-down". Sometimes how we have done things in the past, just isn't right anymore. Because everything has changed. It may be that an old tradition is too hard to do now, and maybe a new tradition can begin. Give yourself permission to roll with such changes, and to be intentional about what changes you implement. Things can stay the same, and if they need to change what change would be helpful?

7. Honor Your Person

It is important to allow yourself time and space to remember your person. What is something you can add to your holiday traditions that honors them, your connection with them, and your continued bond?

What Can I Do About My Grief?

Self-Care Ideas to Consider

- **Keep a journal** of your feelings and grief work. Looking back can help with a sense of progress and healing.
- **Write a letter** to the person who died, tell them exactly what you are going through, this can help with a sense of “unfinished business.”
- **Don’t avoid family days**, but try to plan ahead of time how you will make such time together special, what rituals or traditions will change, and how you will include the memory of the person who has died.
- **Tell others clearly what you want and need.** Reach out to others, they won’t always know to check in with you or how to support you. Be open and talk about your feelings.
- **Eat healthy and get some exercise.**
- **Set small goals at first**, accomplish them. With time set bigger goals to accomplish.
- **Engage in informal and/or formal counseling.** Informal counseling would be talking with family members, friends, or a clergy person. Formal would be appointments with a professionally trained counselor. Relying on support is not a sign of weakness.
- **Allow yourself time and permission to cry.** Tears are a natural experience, and are as natural as laughter and just as healing. Tears, whether shared with others or shed in private, can help release bottled up feelings such as sadness, anger, guilt, exhaustion, and loneliness. It takes a great deal more energy to try to keep your feelings locked inside than to let them out.
- **Use outside stimuli for a cathartic experience.** For example a movie, play, music or books.
- **Concentrate on breathing deep breaths.** Give your body the proper oxygen to function completely. This can feel grounding.
- **Create a safe place and go there**, whether physically in person or in your mind through meditation.
- **Write lists of memories** or qualities about the person who died. Write down things they said that you never want to forget.
- **Take care of yourself.** Meet yourself where you are at in your grief.
- **Take care of someone or something outside of you**, like a plant or pet.
- **Do activities that you enjoy.** If you feel stuck, try something new.
- **Take a long shower**, imagine a waterfall washing away pain and fatigue, covering you and filling you with peace and protection.
- **Talk out loud to the person who died.**
- **Memorialize your loved one**, whether in your home or somewhere else. Visit that place if it is not in your home.
- **Attend a support group** with other grieving individuals, it can give additional support while also giving the sense that you aren’t alone in grief, others understand you and what you are going through.
- **Visit nature.**
- **Use essential oils** or appealing fragrances, this can feel grounding and peaceful.



Care Brainstorming

What/Who do I Need Space From Right Now?:

What Feels too Overwhelming?:

What are Do-Able Tasks for Me to Take Care of Me?:

Who are My Safe Support People in my Grief?:

The Self-Care I Need Right Now Is:



Coping with the Holidays Care Plan



What do I need to do to care for myself this year?

What steps do I need to take?

How will I honor my loved one?

Things I want to continue to do this year...

Things I will change this year...

What I want my family & friends to know...



Things to Remember:

Your Grief is Valid.

There is no timeline to grief. There is no right or wrong in grief.

Grief is the natural response to loss, there's nothing "wrong" with you.

Gratitude does not erase suffering.

Two emotions can happen at the same time – both are true and valid.

Logic Brain and Heart Brain aren't always going to be on the same page.

Two people can grieve the same person differently, and both ways are valid.

Even in the moments we feel isolated and alone, "Grief is our companion." Grief will always remember.

People are typically well intended, but might say stupid things.

What works for one person doesn't mean it will work for another.

Close friends and family might not be the support people you need right now. If not, who are?

Just because someone looks okay when they're grieving doesn't mean they feel okay.

You don't magically "fix" grief, and after one year you aren't magically "better". Grief is not linear.

Medication doesn't "fix" grief. Grief can exacerbate other underlying conditions like depression and anxiety. If you are struggling it is important to talk with a professional.

Grief and sadness are not the same thing.

Grief is not a single emotion.

Grief is a process of integrating the loss into your life. It takes time – but that doesn't mean that "time heals all wounds".

There is no end to grief. Grief changes shape over time.

Avoiding grief won't make it go away.

Not everyone will have a transformative experience in grief. That doesn't mean their experience is "wrong" or "bad" or that they're "stuck".

What works one day may not help the next, and that's okay – ask yourself "what do I need right now?"

Holidays can be really hard when grieving, you don't have to even acknowledge them if you don't want to, and also you can still celebrate them if you want. ***The decision gets to be yours.***



Creating Rituals to Move Through Grief

June 27, 2011 • Contributed by Karla Helbert, MS, LPC, Grief, Loss, and Bereavement
Topic Expert Contributor

We humans like things to stay the same. Even if we are open to change, change can be very difficult. There is nothing more disruptive than the death of someone you love, someone whose existence is part and parcel to your own. When those people die, we are left floundering. That person may be your child, your husband or wife, your companion, your friend, your sister, or your brother. The depth and breadth of your grief depends on the connectedness you feel to the person who has died—your spiritual, emotional, or physical connectedness, and often, your perception of your very *existence*. The more intertwined your life with a person, the more affected you are by your experience of grief when that person dies.

When someone you love dies, you experience deep, soul-wrenching pain. Your life changes. You change. Everything changes. Things are very different than you thought they would be. Yes, it hurts terribly. But there is nothing wrong with you. Grief is not pathological. Grief is normal. It totally sucks, but it *is* normal. Grief is a part of life—a very painful, difficult part of life. And it flat out just sometimes sucks, but it is normal. There are things you can do to help grief along its way; one thing I believe can be the most helpful is to engage in ritual.

What Is a Ritual?

Rituals are actions done in purposeful ways that symbolize something much more than the acts themselves. Rituals are made up of actions that represent ideas, thoughts, myths, or beliefs about a particular thing. Rituals give purpose to action and always serve to connect us to something else, generally something greater than our own solitary selves. We may engage in ritual as we seek peace, clarity of mind, or to become more grounded. We may seek connectedness to family, a particular person, our culture, society, traditions, ancestors, or even to our own selves.

We perform mini-rituals daily. Most of us have a specific routine associated with preparing for bed each night; we may wear a particular piece of jewelry or clothing for specific occasions; or we may make our beds each morning. We might repeat a particular phrase when we make a toast, or perhaps we close our texts or emails in a certain way. Whether small or elaborate, the rituals we engage in tell stories about who we are, who we want to be, and what is important to us in our lives. Your own rituals may be derived from your family, culture, ethnicity, or a

particular religious or spiritual tradition. No matter what stories they tell, rituals always provide structure, meaning, and connectedness.

Perhaps the most significant thing that rituals provide is a certain order to an existence that otherwise might be full of confusion and chaos. Human life is full of confusion and uncertainty and, undoubtedly, the most chaotic times in our lives are the times when we are grieving. Grief is chaos. Times of grief are when we need ritual most. Unfortunately, in our society, there are few rituals that are specifically designed for grieving people, aside from the funeral or memorial service. These are necessary and helpful, but grieving people need more than a couple of rituals to help quell the deep chaos the death of a loved one can bring.

Create Your Own Rituals

Creating your own personal rituals to remember your loved ones allows you to access and work through your grief in a safe and constructive way. Some people plan rituals in honor of a loved one's birthday or an anniversary. Others choose to express their grief through small daily or weekly rituals. A ritual can be as elaborate as a public memorial service or as small as a quiet moment alone with your loved one's picture. Some examples of small rituals include:

- Lighting a candle at certain, special times of the day or week to remind you of your loved one (for example, at dinnertime to represent sharing meals with him or her)
- Creating a memory scrapbook and filling it with photographs, letters, postcards, notes, or other significant memorabilia from your life together
- Spending time listening to your loved one's favorite music or creating a special mix of music that reminds you of that person
- Watching his or her favorite movie
- Planting a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory
- Making a donation to a charity that your loved one supported
- Visiting your loved one's burial site
- Carrying something special that reminds you of your loved one that you can take out and hold when you feel the need
- Creating a work of art in your loved one's memory
- Preparing and eating a special meal in honor of your loved one
- Developing a memorial ritual for your loved one on special days or whenever you wish

Some people engage in the smaller, spontaneous rituals listed above on a regular basis. You may do something similar, or you might choose to create a more structured ritual. You may decide to create a special ritual only one



time, or you might decide to hold your ritual (or some version of it) on a regular basis—daily, weekly, monthly, or on special days like birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, or other special occasions.

When selecting activities for a more structured grief ritual, choose specific things to mark the opening and the closing of your ritual:

- Light a special candle used only for your ritual purposes
- Light some incense
- Read or say aloud an inspirational verse, poem, or prayer
- Sing a song
- Chant
- Play a particular selection of music
- Ring a chime or a bell

Clearly marking the beginning and the end of the ritual will help you transition into a different frame of mind at the opening, and it will signal that it is time to shift consciousness back to the mundane at the closing.

Remain Open: Do What Feels Comfortable to You

Before starting the ceremony, take a few deep breaths to center yourself. Remember that it is okay if you cry. This is your space and time to express your grief in whatever ways you need to do so. If all you can do is cry during your planned ritual time, most likely, that is what you need to do. Whatever happens in between the opening and closing of the ritual is completely up to you. You can have an activity planned, or you may be the sort of person who feels more comfortable planning nothing at all. Perhaps you'll choose to do whatever you are moved to do once you are in the ritual space—you might wish to simply sit quietly for as long as you need to, listen to music, spend time crying, look through photos of your loved one, meditate, pray, or read some healing literature or a sacred text. It is okay to remain open and do whatever comes to you in the moment.

Sometimes you may feel the need to communicate something to your loved one. The sacred, safe space of a ritual is an ideal place to do this. When you need to communicate, you may choose to speak aloud, meditate on your thoughts silently, or write your thoughts in a letter. Consider incorporating the burning, burying, or floating of the letter that you write in a future ritual.

You may simply feel the need to release energy in your ritual space. Yell, scream, or cry as much as you need to. If you're working through feelings of anger in your grief, keep pillows nearby that you can hit, punch, or throw. Tearing and ripping paper or stomping cardboard boxes can also help release anger. You may wish to include



some movement, dance, or vocal expression such as singing, chanting, or yelling. You might want to beat on a drum or play some other instrument to release energy and emotion through sound.

Consider Inviting Others

You can conduct your grief rituals alone or with others. Your ritual could be an ideal time to share your grief with friends and family members grieving the same loss. If you invite others to join your ritual, you may wish to ask each person to share something about your lost loved one—a memory, story, or thought. Ask guests to bring something to read or share as part of the ritual, and invite them to participate in any ritual activity you develop, such as chanting, drumming, or letter-writing.

Continue Your Ritual as Needed

Conduct your grief rituals for as long and as often as you need to. As you heal, you may find that your need to engage in ritual for your grief will wane. Continuing to maintain some of your small rituals, such as continuing to carry your loved one's photograph or wearing a particular sentimental piece of jewelry may serve you. Your more elaborate rituals may change over time, or you may feel the need to hold them only on special occasions, such as birthdays or anniversaries. If you have created a shrine or altar that you have used in your rituals or kept in your home, you may find that you wish to make changes to it over time. This is okay, too. The changes mean that your personal process through grief is progressing, and your rituals have helped you move from chaos and pain to wholeness and stability.

I hope that this has helped you think about ritual and how you might use it as you move through your own grief process. Please feel free to comment about how ritual has helped you, what kinds of ritual activity has helped you—large or small—and what your thoughts are on engaging in ritual to help us move toward healing.

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Four Candles Ritual

Together we will light four candles in order while the following is read. Please center yourself in a space of calming, bring the person you are grieving to the forefront of your mind and connect yourself to your breath.

This first candle represents our grief.

The pain of losing you is intense.

It reminds us of the depth of our love for you.

This second candle represents our courage,

To confront our sorrow, to comfort each other,

To change our lives.

This third candle we light in your memory.

For the times we laughed, the times we cried,

The times we were angry with each other,

The silly things you did, the caring and joy you gave us.

This fourth candle we light for our love.

We light this candle that your light will always shine.

As we think of you each day and share your memory with our family and friends.

We thank you for the gift your living brought to us.

We love you. We remember you.



NOVEMBER 19, 2020

Alone Together: 14 Ideas for a Virtual Holiday

HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS / HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS : LITSA

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/alone-together-14-ideas-for-a-virtual-holiday/>

In a year of unprecedented loss, there is a fair chance that facing the holidays is filling you with dread. If so, you're not alone. More than ever, this year people are thinking about traditions that will have to shift or won't happen at all. After a year of distancing and isolation, the thought of a holiday without the usual family togetherness may feel like a difficult pill to swallow. We have heard many people asking for virtual holiday celebration ideas if you can't be with your family for the holiday. There are no brilliant plans that will make things feel 'normal' in a world that is anything but. But we do have some creative ideas that can allow you to feel close with family when you can't be together for the holiday.

A quick note on the language we use around here – when we say “family”, we mean blood family or **found family**.

Let's get started, from the obvious virtual holiday ideas to some more creative suggestions.

1. Have a Virtual Holiday Meal

Yes, this is the most obvious, but we at least have to mention it! Zoom is not just for work meetings. Find a platform your family is comfortable with, set a time, and plan to all join and have your holiday meal with one another on-screen! No, it won't be the same. Not even close. But just because something isn't the same doesn't mean it can't have meaning and value. Pro-tip: if you have family members who aren't tech-savvy, you may want to do a trial run to make sure everyone is comfortable.

2. Have a Sides and Dessert Exchange

If your family lives locally but you all won't be spending the day together for safety reasons, you can still share the same meal. Have each person make a side dish (ideally one that reheats well) that is enough to feed everyone. Split it up into containers. Plan a socially distanced exchange, dropping the dish off at doorsteps. Whether you then share a virtual meal together or each eat on your own, there can be a nice comfort in sharing food with those you love and knowing everyone is having the same meal!

3. Have a Recipe Exchange



If you aren't in the same area or don't feel comfortable doing a side-dish share, another alternative is simply gathering recipes through an exchange. You'll basically be planning your holiday meal by each submitting one recipe. Each person (or household) picks a recipe to share for the menu and then everyone makes the same recipes in their own homes for the holiday. This gives the nice connection of everyone having the same meal for your virtual holiday, with the added bonus of sharing new recipes!

4. Teach the Family Recipes

This is a great year for families to pass on the tradition of some of their family recipes that one person always makes. This could be a dish your loved one made or loved, or just any significant recipe to pass along. If you have people in your household to teach, that's great. But if you don't, this is another place where Zoom or FaceTime can come in handy. Take a cue from this great radio story about a grandmother who used Zoom for just this reason! Set up a time to virtually coach family members through those recipes.

5. Play Games

I know when we talk about games in a virtual world, people often jump to games that can be played online. But there are plenty of game options for your virtual holiday celebration.

- **Online games:** Check out [Jackbox](#) or a similar service.
- **You can play old fashioned board games** too, assuming each person has a copy of the game. Each person sets up their board in their home, and you just have to move the other person on your board after their turn, so everyone can keep track in their respective houses! Not the perfect game night, but could be worse!
- **Trivia** is always an easy virtual option. To take the work off one planner (and to make sure everyone gets to participate in the fun) you can have each person create a round of questions! You can also use [Kahoot](#) to search for already-made trivia or to make your own.
- **Bingo** is a great virtual game. There are even cute [winter-themed ready-to-print bingo cards](#) out there... Just make sure you tell people which cards to use/print, so everyone isn't playing with the same card. You can also [create your own custom bingo boards](#) online and play virtually.
- **Pictionary** is super fun to play over Zoom for those who are a bit more tech-savvy! Simply use the whiteboard feature and a [pictionary word generator](#) to take turns guessing!

6. Plan a 'Christmas or Hanukkah in July'

Now, this one could be risky, as we don't know what July will hold. But if your family is skipping the gathering this year, put it on the calendar now for July. Though of course, you can still join virtual services to participate in the spiritual aspects of the holiday, the family festivities will be put entirely on hold. You may even want to jump on a Zoom during the holidays just to talk about and start planning your big holiday in July! Bonus: There are some great flight deals right now with no change or cancellation fees, so if travel is part of your Christmas in July plan, now is a good time to book.

7. Use the Virtual Holiday Time to Create Something as a Family – A photo album, an oral history, or something else creative!

If a huge part of what you feel you're losing this holiday is family togetherness, use the day to create something as a family. The options are endless, but some ideas are:

- Collect all those digital photos you all have on different devices and create a family photo book.
- Start a family memories archive. After a loss, we become so aware of how family histories or memories are lost when people die. Create questions that you would like your family to all answer about themselves and/or each other and start creating an oral history for the family. We have a post on [creating an oral history here](#) with tons of information to get you started.
- Gather on Zoom and work on your ancestry together.
- Create a family recipe book by compiling all of your go-to recipes on a GoogleDoc, or use an [online service](#).

8. Have a Ginger Bread House Making Competition.

Plan for each person or family to make their own Gingerbread House. Everyone can jump on Zoom and hang out while making them, or just set a time to all join together to show off your Gingerbread Houses and have a judging! (If you use Zoom, you could set up a poll that would allow everyone to vote for their favorite). For those who live alone, this could leave them with a big Gingerbread House to eat all alone... but hey, it's been a tough year. Maybe we all deserve a Gingerbread House all to ourselves!



9. Watch a Holiday Movie ‘Together’

Now, you can do this the old fashioned way. Just hit play at the same time and chat by text. But there are also services that make this more integrated. You can use [Netflix Party \(now officially called teleparty\)](#). You can also check out this article on the [7 best ways to watch movies together online](#) for other services.

10. Create New Traditions

When we are so caught up focusing on the traditions that have to change, we sometimes forget that we can start new traditions. Sometimes we feel [guilty about the holidays not being perfect](#). Accept that [holiday traditions](#) will need to change and remember that you can start new traditions! Maybe you decide to try a new recipe based on all that pandemic cooking and baking you've been doing this year that will forever be remembered as the "COVID sweet potato souffle". Perhaps you decide to go for a family socially-distanced morning walk or hike that could become a new tradition. Be creative. Having a non-traditional or virtual holiday opens up all sorts of possibilities! And even if it doesn't turn out to be a tradition that sticks, no harm done for trying!

11. Have a Virtual White Elephant Gift Exchange.

Now, you may be doing the regular gift thing this year. But if not being together or tight finances are giving you a reason for pause, a White Elephant exchange might be just the thing! If you don't know how it works, [teambuilding.com](#) has a full article on [how to do a virtual White Elephant gift exchange](#). Check out their full post for details, but the basics are pretty straightforward:

1. Set a budget.
2. Instruct all participants to buy and wrap a fun present.
3. Gather together on a video call.
4. Choose a picking order. You can use a generator like [random.org](#) to determine the order.
5. Gifters will hold up all presents. You could also use a [PowerPoint template](#) to display the options.
6. Each participant picks a present. The gifter unwraps on camera.
7. The next player takes a turn, either stealing the present or unwrapping a new present.
8. The game continues until all presents are gone.
9. Once the event concludes, gifters send presents to the rightful owners.

12. Skip the Meal – Have a virtual holiday “tasting party”!



A whole virtual holiday meal on Zoom can feel like a lot, so this can be a nice way to share some time and food together without it being a full meal! This takes some time for shopping and shipping, so you might want to get going if your family likes this idea. Plan for a special “tasting” of some fancy pre or post-meal goodies. Do this based on what your family likes – You could all sample fancy cheeses before dinner, fancy wine, fancy hot chocolate after dinner (yes, there are all sorts of types of hot chocolate), or fancy truffles or other desserts. The key is to get the samples sent out to everyone in advance or give everyone the list to

buy/order themselves, so everything arrives on time. Then gather together on Zoom for some quality time and to taste your yummy goodies together!

13. Create a Family Gratitude Video or Have a Gratitude Zoom

This has been a tough year and it might be a tough holiday. Find a way as a family to share some gratitude. Maybe you don't want to have a full Zoom meal, but you can set a time to all jump on Zoom and share something you're grateful for. If one person doesn't mind compiling it, alternately you could ask each person to record a short video of their gratitude that could then be edited together and sent out to the whole family to watch.

14. Have a Memory Show-and-Tell

Ask each person to bring one photo or other object that reminds them of a favorite memory of the person or people in your family who have died. Have everyone go around on Zoom and show their photo or object and tell the story that goes with it!

64 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays

[HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS](#) / **HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS : LITSA WILLIAMS**

[HTTPS://WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM/64-TIPS-GRIEF-AT-THE-HOLIDAYS/](https://whatsyourgrief.com/64-tips-grief-at-the-holidays/)

Once upon a time, I made this random list of [64 things I wish someone had told me about grief](#). In response, our readers shared about a zillion things they would add to the list. With December upon us, we've been inspired to make another list about grief at the holidays, in hopes that we may get a zillion more comments with your thoughts and suggestions for coping.

So here it is – 64 pro-tips for coping with grief at the holidays. Please share with us in the comments what has worked for you in holidays past, or how you plan to cope with the holidays this year. The holidays are tough for all of us, so the least we can do is share our tips and tricks with one another to make the season just a smidge more tolerable.

64 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holiday

1. Acknowledge that the holidays will be different and they will be tough.
2. Decide which traditions you want to keep.
3. Decide which traditions you want to change.
4. Create a new tradition in memory of your loved one.
5. Decide where you want to spend the holidays – you may want to switch up the location, or it may be of comfort to keep it the same. Either way, make a conscious decision about location.
6. [Plan ahead and communicate with the people you will spend the holiday with in advance, to make sure everyone is in agreement about traditions and plans.](#)
7. Remember that not everyone will be grieving the same way you are grieving.
8. Remember that the way others will want to spend the holiday may not match how you want to spend the holiday.
9. [Put out a 'memory stocking', 'memory box', or another special place where you and others can write down memories you treasure. Pick a time to read them together.](#)
10. Light a candle in your home in memory of the person you've lost.
11. [Include one of your loved one's favorite dishes in your holiday meal.](#)

12. Be honest. Tell people what you DO want to do for the holidays and what you DON'T want to do.
13. Make a donation to a charity that was important to your loved one in their name.
14. Buy a gift you would have given to your loved one and donate it to a local charity.
15. If you are feeling really ambitious, adopt a family in memory of your loved one. This can often be done through a church, salvation army, or goodwill.
16. See a counselor. Maybe you've been putting it off. The holidays are especially tough, so this may be the time to talk to someone.
17. Pick a few special items that belonged to your loved one and gift them to friends or family who will appreciate them.
18. Make a memorial ornament, wreath, or other decoration in honor of your loved one.
19. If you have been having a hard time parting with your loved one's clothing, use the holidays as an opportunity to donate some items to a homeless shelter or other charity.
20. Send a holiday card to friends of your loved one who you may regret having lost touch with.
21. Visit your loved one's gravesite and leave a grave blanket, wreath, poinsettia, or another meaningful holiday item.
22. Play your loved one's favorite holiday music.
23. If your loved one hated holiday music, that's okay! Play whatever music they loved.
24. Journal when you are having an especially bad day.
25. Skip holiday events if you are in holiday overload.
26. Don't feel guilty about skipping events if you're experiencing holiday overload!
27. Don't get trapped. When you go to holiday events, drive yourself so you can leave if it gets to be too much.
28. Pull out old photo albums and spend some time on the holiday looking at photos.
29. Talk to kids about the holidays – it can be confusing for kids that the holidays can be both happy and sad after a death. Let them know it is okay to enjoy the holiday, and it is okay to be sad.
30. Make a dish that your loved one used to make. Don't get discouraged if you try to make their dish and you fail. We've all been there (or, at least I've been there!).
31. Leave an empty seat at the holiday table in memory of your loved one.

32. If leaving an empty seat is too depressing, invite someone who doesn't have any family to spend the holiday with.
33. Don't send holiday cards this year if it is too sad or overwhelming.
34. Don't feel [guilty about not sending holiday cards!](#)
35. [Create a 'dear photograph', with a photo of a holiday past.](#)
36. Skip or minimize gifts. After a death, material things can seem less meaningful and the mall can seem especially stressful. Talk as a family and decide whether you truly want to exchange gifts this year.
37. Put out a photo table with photos of your loved one at holiday celebrations in the past.
38. Go to a grief group. When everyone looks so gosh-darn filled with holiday cheer, sometimes it is helpful to talk with others who are struggling.
39. Skip (or minimize) the decorations if they are too much this year. Don't worry, you'll see plenty of decorations outside your house.
40. Don't feel guilty if you skip or minimize the decorations!
41. Remember that crying is okay. The holidays are everywhere and who knows what may trigger a cry-fest. [We've all been there and it is okay to cry \(even if you are in the sock aisle at Target\).](#)
42. Volunteer in your loved one's memory.
43. Let your perfectionism go. If you always have the perfect tree, perfectly wrapped gifts, and perfect table, accept that this year may not be perfect and that is a-okay. I know this is easier said than done for you type-As, but give it a try.
44. Ignore people who want to tell you what you "should" do for the holiday. Listen to yourself, trust yourself, communicate with your family, and do what works for you.
45. Seek gratitude. I am the queen of holiday funks, so I know this is tough. But try to find one daily gratitude throughout the holiday season. Write it down, photograph it, share it on facebook. Whatever. Just look for the little things. [Here are some tips if you're struggling with it.](#)
46. Watch the food. Food can make us feel better in the short term (damn you, dopamine!) until we feel like crap later that we ate that whole tin of holiday cookies. Don't deprive yourself, but be careful that you don't let food become your holiday comfort.
47. [Watch the booze. Alcohol can become a fast friend when we are grieving. If that holiday party is getting to be too much, head home instead of to the open bar.](#)
48. If you are stressed about making the holiday dinner, ask someone else to cook or buy dinner this year.

49. If you are stressed about the crowds at the mall, cut back on gifts or do your shopping online.
50. Splurge on a gift for you. Grief can make us feel a little entitled and self-involved, and that is okay sometimes (within reason, of course). Splurge on a holiday gift for yourself this year, And make it a good one!
51. Say yes to help. There will be people who want to help and may offer their support. Take them up on their offers.
52. [Ask for help.](#) If people aren't offering, ask. This can be super-hard if it isn't your style, but it is important. Asking others to help with cooking, shopping, or decorating can be a big relief.
53. Have a moment of silence during your holiday prayer or toast in memory of your loved one.
54. Donate a holiday meal to a family in need through a local church, salvation army, or department of social services.
55. [Identify the people who will be able to help and support you during the holidays and identify who may cause you more stress. Try to spend more time with the former group and less with the latter.](#)
56. Make some quiet time for yourself. The holidays can be hectic, make quiet time for yourself to journal, meditate, listen to music, etc.
57. Practice self-care. I know, how cliché. But it is true – whatever it is that helps you recharge, do it. [You can find some self-care tips here.](#)
58. [Support kids by doing a memorial grief activity together.](#)
59. Donate altar flowers or other holiday decorations at your place of worship in memory of your loved one.
60. Prioritize and don't overcommit. When the holidays are filled with so many parties, dinners, and events, save your energy for those that are most important. Look at everything you have to do and rank them in order of importance. Plan for the most important and skip the rest.
61. [Make a list and check it twice.](#) Grief makes it harder for us to concentrate and remember things. When you have a lot going on at the holidays, make a list even if you aren't usually a list-maker, and write things on the calendar.
62. Skip it. Really. If you just can't face the holiday it is okay to take a break this year. [Before you get to this extreme, consider if you could just simplify your holiday.](#) If you do skip, still make a plan. Decide if you will still see friends or family, go see a new movie, or make another plan.
63. Enjoy yourself! The holidays will be tough, but there will also be love and joy.
64. Remember, it is okay to be happy – this doesn't diminish how much you love and miss the person who isn't there this holiday. Don't feel guilty for the joy you do find this holiday season.

<https://grief.com/grief-the-holidays/> David Kessler

GRIEF & THE HOLIDAYS

"The holidays are times spent with our loved ones." This has been imprinted on our psyche from a young age. Holidays mark the passage of time in our lives. They are part of the milestones we share with each other and they generally represent time spent with family. But since holidays are for being with those we love the most, how on earth can anyone be expected to cope with them when a loved one has died? For many people, this is the hardest part of grieving, when we miss our loved ones even more than usual. How can we celebrate togetherness when there is none?

When you lose someone special, your world lacks its celebratory qualities. Holidays magnify that loss. The sadness deepens and the loneliness can feel isolating. The need for support may be the greatest during the holidays. Pretending you don't hurt and/or it isn't a harder time of the year is just not the truth for you. But you can – and will – get through the holidays. Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them. It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain. No one can take that pain away, but grief is not just pain, grief is love. Here is a video that may help you with www.HolidayGrief.com. There are a number of ways to incorporate your loved one and your loss into the holidays.

Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, New Years

These are the biggest and usually most challenging of all. You can and will get through the Holidays. Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them. It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain. Grief is the way out of the pain. Grief is our internal feelings and mourning is our external expressions.

Ways to externalize the loss – give it a time and a place

- A prayer before the Holiday dinner, about your loved one.
- Light a candle for your loved one.
- Create an online tribute for them.
- Share a favorite story about your loved one.
- Have everyone tell a funny story about your loved one.
- At your place of worship remember them in a prayer.
- Chat online about them.

Ways to Cope

Have a Plan A/Plan B – Plan A is you go to that holiday dinner with family and friends and if it doesn't feel right, have your plan B ready. Plan B may be watching a movie you both liked, or looking through a photo album, or going to a special place you went to together. Many people find that when they have Plan B in place, just knowing it is there is enough.

Cancel the holiday altogether. Yes, you can cancel the holiday. If you are going through the motions and feel nothing, cancel them. Take a year off. The holidays will come around again and will always be there. For other people, staying involved with the holidays is a symbol of life continuing. Let the holiday routine give you a framework during these tough times, and lean on a holiday support system.

Try the holidays in a new way. Grief has a unique way of giving us permission to evaluate what parts of the holidays we enjoy and what parts we don't. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays in grief. You have to decide what is right for you and do it. You have every right to change your mind, even a few times. Friends and family members may not have a clue how to help you through this time of year, and you may not either.

It is very natural to feel you may never enjoy this time of year again. They will certainly never be the same as before your loved one's death. However, in time, most people are able to find meaning again in the traditions as a new form

of the holiday spirit grows inside of them. Even without grief, our friends and relatives often think they know how our holidays should look, what “the family” should and shouldn’t do.

Do’s and Don’ts

- Do be gentle with yourself and protect yourself.
- Don’t do more than you want, and don’t do anything that does not serve your soul and your loss.
- Do allow time for the feelings.
- Don’t keep feelings bottled up. If you have 500 tears to cry don’t stop at 250.
- Do allow others to help. We all need help at certain times in our lives.
- Don’t ask if you can help or should help a friend in grief. Just help. Find ways; invite them to group events or just out for coffee.
- Do, in grief, pay extra attention to the children. Children are too often the forgotten grievers.

Valentines Day

Valentines Day is a day to honor our spouse, girlfriend / boyfriend or anyone we are romantically involved with in the present. The past can represent a hole in your heart where your loved one used to be.

Tips

- Write a love letter
- Smile a smile for them
- Light a red candle
- Tell someone about them.

Mother’s Day and Father’s Day

Mother and Fathers Day are often thought of as an invisible sad day of mourning while many people are rushing around trying to get that perfect gift or make sure they remember to send mom / dad a card. There are over one hundred million Americans that for them, this is a sad day. Either because they have a mother or father who has died or a child has died.

Tips

- Find ways to honor and remember your mother/ father or both. Think of ways to honor your child.
- Light a candle
- Say a prayer
- Donate time or money in their name.
- Do something you loved to do together on that day.

It isn’t as important how you remember, you honor them by the fact that you remember.

Just Remember

Holidays are clearly some of the roughest terrains we navigate after a loss. Finding meaning in the loss is as individual as we are. We often say a part of us died with them, but finding meaning is also realizing a part of them still lives within us. What is vitally important is that we be present for the loss in whatever form the holidays do or don’t take. These holidays are part of the grieving journey that we must fully feel. They are usually very sad, but sometimes we may catch ourselves doing okay, and we may even have a brief moment of laughter. Now more than ever, be gentle with yourself. Don’t do more than you want, and don’t do anything that does not serve your soul, your loss, or the meaning that still lives within you.

Three C's for Holiday Grief

<https://hospicefoundation.org/End-of-Life-Support-and-Resources/Grief-Support/Journeys-with-Grief-Articles/Three-C-s-for-Holiday-Grief>

For those who are grieving, the holidays can be unfamiliar terrain. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, this time is filled with fond remembrances of loved ones who are on your mind yet absent from your traditions and rituals. Acknowledging the difficulties of holidays after loss does not make a potentially difficult time any easier, but preparing for the holidays by tapping into helpful coping strategies may provide some much-needed help.

Follow these “three C’s” recommended by HFA grief expert Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, to help navigate your way through this difficult time.

CHOOSE

During the holidays, it’s easy to drift into activities that have the potential to increase your pain. You have choices. Decide what 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. She chose to go to her sister-in-law’s house for dessert.

You may also want to consider how to mark your loss during the holidays. During the holidays you may feel the presence of that person’s absence. Finding ways to recognize and acknowledge that individual can bring a positive focus to your grief. This may be done in a number of ways. Lighting a candle, creating a ritual, placing a memento on a tree, holding a moment of silence or a holiday toast are simple ways to acknowledge the losses felt so keenly this time of year.

COMMUNICATE

Discussing your choices with others, especially those affected by them, is important. They have needs as well. 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 June’s need for flexibility. Traditions may come into play because they involve choices. Communication about them is important. 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. They talked through each point of view, and decided to have a small tree—not in the central living room, but in the family room. Those who wanted to help decorate could, but those who chose not to would also be respected.

Nothing changes the fact that the holidays 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.



HeartLight Recommended Books on Grief

There are many books out there covering a wide variety of topics about grief and loss. We encourage you to browse a bookstore, online listings or library. We hope this offers a comprehensive starting place.

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis

Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief by Pauline Boss

Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief by Joanne Cacciatore

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande

Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve by Sandra Gilbert

Don't Ask for the Dead Man's Golf Clubs: What to Do and Say (And What Not To) When a Friend Loses a Loved One by Lynn Kelly

Farewell My Friend: A Step-By-Step Guide to Handling a Serious Illness and Even the Death of a Loved One by Beatrice Toney Bailey

Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief by David Kessler

Finding Peace, One Piece at a Time: What To Do With Your and a Loved One's Personal Possessions by Rachel Blythe Kodanaz

Grieving While Black: An Antiracist Take on Oppression and Sorrow by Breeshia Wade

Healing Your Grieving Heart When Someone You Care About Has Alzheimer's: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends, and Caregivers by Alan Wolfelt

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by Martha Whitmore Hickman

Holding Space: On Loving, Dying, and Letting Go by Amy Wright Glenn

How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies by Therese A. Rando

I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One by Brook Noel and Pamela Blair

I'm Grieving as Fast as I Can: How Young Widows and Widowers Can Cope and Heal by Linda Feinberg

It's Okay that You're Not Okay: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture that Doesn't Understand by Megan Devine

It's Okay to Laugh: (Crying is Cool Too) by Nora McInerny Purmort

Losing My Best Friend: Thoughtful support for those affected by dog bereavement or pet loss by Jeannie Wycherley

Loss of a Parent by Theresa Jackson

Loving Someone Who Has Dementia: How to find Hope while coping with Stress and Grief by Pauline Boss

Modern Loss: Candid Conversation About Grief. Beginners Welcome. by Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Kirkner

Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss by Hope Edelman

My Children in Heaven: A Story of Grief, Hope, and Love by Roseanne M. Collison

Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy by Sheryl Sandberg

Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive by Allison Gilbert

Permission to Mourn: A New Way to Do Grief by Tom Zuba

Please Be Patient, I'm Grieving: How to Care For and Support the Grieving Heart by Gary Roe

Poems of Mourning by Peter Washington

Prayers for Honoring Grief by Pixie Lighthorse

Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey Into the Afterlife by Eben Alexander, M.D.

Relentless Goodbye: Grief and Love in the Shadow of Dementia by Ginnie Burkholder

Resilient Grieving: Finding Strength and Embracing Life After a Loss that Changes Everything by Lucy Hone and Karen Reivich

Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide by Christopher Lukas and Henry M Seiden

Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living through Grief when an Adult Brother or Sister Dies by T.J. Wray



Spark Seekers: Mourning with Meaning; Living with Light by Rabbi Baruch HaLevi, DMin
The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing by Kevin Young
The Bright Hour: A Memoir of Living and Dying by Nina Riggs
The Dead Moms Club: A Memoir about Death, Grief and Surviving the Mother of All Losses by Kate Spencer
The Longest Lost: Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia by Hospice Foundation of America and Kenneth J. Doka and Amy S. Tucci
The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief by Francis Weller
Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal by Alan Wolfelt
Understanding Guilt During Bereavement by Bob Baugher
Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart by Alan Wolfelt
When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold S. Kushner
When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi
When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times by Pema Chodron
When Your Soulmate Dies: A Guide to Healing through Heroic Mourning by Alan Wolfelt
Widow To Widow: Thoughtful, Practical Ideas For Rebuilding Your Life by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg

Specifically For Professional and Volunteer Caregivers:

Catch-Up Mourning by Alan Wolfelt
Companioning the Bereaved: A Soulful Guide for Counselors and Caregivers by Alan Wolfelt
Grief and the Expressive Arts : Practices for Creating Meaning by Barbara E. Thompson (Editor), Robert A. Neimeyer (Editor)
Lost in the Wilderness of Complicated Grief by Alan Wolfelt
Reframing PTSD as Traumatic Grief: How Caregivers Can Companion Traumatized Grievors through
The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss by George A. Bonanno
Thoughtful Dementia Care: Understanding the Dementia Experience by Jennifer Ghent-Fuller
When Grief is Complicated: A Model for Therapists to Understand, Identify, and Companion Grievors

Books for and about Child/Teen Grief:

I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas
Sun Kisses, Moon Hugs by Susan Schaefer Bernardo
Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss by Chuck DeKlyen and Pat Schwiebert
Teens Dealing with Death: Stories from my Students by Susan Romero
Teen Grief: Caring for the Grieving Teenage Heart by Gary Roe
The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia
The Healing Your Grieving Heart Journal for Teens by Alan Wolfelt
The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
The Memory Box by Joanna Rowland
Weird is Normal When Teenagers Grieve by Jenny Lee Wheeler



For additional information, resources and support visit www.heartlightcenter.org or call us at 720-748-9908