

Help with the Holidays

A Guide from Lost & Found Grief Center

This booklet is designed to help you and your family navigate the holiday season. The ideas come from grief experts, our friends at other grief centers and the experiences of the many families who have attended groups at Lost & Found Grief Center.



Getting Through the Holidays While Grieving

Take Care of Yourself

We are conditioned to feel this is selfish, but when grieving, this is absolutely essential. Grief is physically and emotionally exhausting.

Set Boundaries

Know what you are willing to do and not do.
Pressure comes from family, well-intentioned friends,
and traditions. Let others know you are setting
boundaries for your emotional and physical well-being.

Be with the People You Enjoy

This is NOT the time to feel obligated to meet the needs of others if they drain you of your energy.

Be Your Own Captain of Kindness

Recognize the positive steps you have taken to survive this loss. Give yourself credit for getting up each day and putting one foot in front of the other. Some days this is all you can do...and that's okay.

Sadly, there are no magic answers to make the pain disappear. However, anticipating and planning ahead can help lessen unexpected and awkward times.

Getting Through the Holidays While Grieving

Let Go of Expectations and Pressures

Some are unrealistic. Some are just unfair in a time of grief. Some are self-imposed; some come from others.

Skip or minimize decorations and gatherings.

Give Yourself Permission

You're allowed to change your mind at any time. You may decide to attend a function, only to find at the last minute that it feels like too much. If so, simply bow out.

Don't beat yourself up.

Anticipate Grief Triggers and Avoid If Possible
Expectations of holiday cheer and fa-la-la are
everywhere. Awareness will help prevent being
caught off-guard.

You Have the Right to Set Limits

Explain your needs, limitations, and boundaries to family members. Simply explain, ask for their understanding, and stand firm.

Remember that a holiday is just a date on the calendar that will pass. You can get together with others at a later time when you feel stronger.

Assessing Traditions

Holidays are full of traditions which can become triggers for grief. To assess how to manage your family's traditions this year, make a list of the holiday traditions and rituals that have been part of your past holidays.

These can include food, decorations, family gatherings, and music.

Ask yourself and family members these questions about each tradition you identify:

How do you feel about it?

Why do you do it?

Does it have to be done?

What would happen if you didn't do it?

How might you make it different

to make it easier this year?

Who can help?



The answers to these questions will help you make decisions about how to move forward during this holiday season.

New Traditions to Consider

- Light a memorial candle and take time to share special memories of your loved one.
- Prepare a holiday dish/dessert/drink in their memory.
- Make a memory tablecloth-have family and guests write and draw favorite memories that involve your loved one.
- Create and hang a special stocking for your loved one; place special memories inside it.
- Create an ornament or wreath in your loved one's memory.
- Create a memory box. You can ask others to write holiday memories or gratitudes, wrap it, and decide if or when you to open it.
- Buy a small tree and decorate it in memory of your loved one. You may decorate with a theme that fits your loved one (hobby, sport, etc.).
- Purchase a gift your loved one would have liked and give it to a charity or make a donation to a charity in your loved one's name.
- Go somewhere different to provide a change of scenery.
- Purchase a special gift for yourself.
- Decorate the gravesite with a special tree, wreath, or grave blanket for the holidays.

Give yourself permission to try something new, and then abandon it if you don't like the change.

Helping Grieving Children Through the Holidays

The holidays can be a magical time of year. However, grieving children also struggle with the changes and sadness. The following are tips to help families support children through the holiday season:

Communicate

Children get their cues from you. Tell them you miss the person who died, and you are sad that things can't be the same as before. Children may need to hear this to know they have permission to express their feelings.

Plan

Set realistic expectations. Anticipate difficult times. Create an escape plan in case an event is more than you or your children can handle, and trust others to help with this, if needed. Decide which traditions to keep and which to change. Remember you can change your mind after this year if you don't like the change.

Play

Play is essential for grieving children. They need breaks from their grief.

Feelings

Talk about feelings. Ask questions, LISTEN, don't try to fix things for them. Allow tears and laughter. Both are healing. They may want to express feelings through artwork, painting, writing, music, etc. Assure children that feeling happy is okay.

Help

Identify a support network of other people who can help your children feel comforted, loved, and safe. This support may also take pressure off of you.

Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Memory Making

Share memories of the deceased. Allow your children to remember their loved one through a tribute. A candle lighting, special ornament, or favorite photograph are things you could do to honor your loved one.





Most people experience stress and pressure around the holiday season. Adding grief to this time creates even more challenges. We hope this booklet will help you manage the pain and sadness of your grief during this season. Lower your expectations, get through it, and know it won't always hurt this badly.



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