

# Tips for Handling Grief at the Holidays

There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays - plan ahead.

Handle the holidays the best you can and observe them in ways which are comfortable to you. Well-meaning friends and family often try to suggest what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Sit down with your family (include the children) and/or friends and be honest with each other about your feelings and decide what you want to do for the holidays. Do not set expectations too high. Once you have made decisions on the role you and your family will play during the holidays, let relatives and friends know. Decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new ones you would like to begin. Only make changes that feel comfortable to you.

1. **Take care of yourself.** Avoid overindulgence in alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and sweets. Grief takes its toll on one physically, as well as emotionally. Eat well, exercise if possible, and get as much sleep as needed. Avoid additional stress.
2. **Do something special for yourself.** Buy yourself a gift in memory of your loved one, perhaps something you think they would want you to have. Treat yourself to a massage, manicure/pedicure and dinner out with family and/or friends, or write your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
3. **Allow yourself to express your feelings.** Recognize that the holidays will not be the same. Feel whatever it is you feel, not what others tell you to feel. Feelings like sadness, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt and apathy are common and normal at this time. Share your feelings with family or friends and let them know your needs.
4. **Give yourself permission to cry.** If you feel the urge to cry, let the tears flow. Grieving is normal and tears are healing. It is usually better not to push the tears down at any time. Worrying about crying is an additional burden. Be gentle with yourself.
5. **Do not isolate.** Be careful not to isolate yourself. It is alright to take time for yourself but do not cut yourself off from your support network.
6. **Accept help.** When others offer help, accept it. The holidays are a draining time of year for most people and those who are grieving may experience a lack of energy. By allowing others to help you, you can help them. Tell others if you are struggling and be specific about how they can help you.

7. **Decide with whom to spend your time.** Spend time with people who are supportive and remove yourself from environments and/or people who do not support your grieving needs.
8. **Consider doing something special for someone else.** Donate a gift in the memory of your loved one. Donate money you would have spent on your loved one as a gift to charity. Adopt a family in need for the holidays. Invite a guest to share the holidays with you.
9. **Remember your loved one.** If you feel comfortable; share stories about your deceased loved one. Look at old photos. Observe a moment of silence or prayer to honor the person's memory and keep him or her apart of the holiday. Place an empty chair where they would normally sit and light a candle or place a flower at that place. Decide if you want to talk about your loved one during the holidays or not and let others know.
10. **Do not feel guilty.** It is OK to enjoy yourself during the holidays and to laugh. Your loved one would not want you to sop joy from entering your life. If you find yourself laughing or enjoying holidays, you are not insulting your loved one's memory, rather uplifting it.
11. **Time heals.** Often after the first holidays without your loved one people in your life may expect you to be over it. We are never over it but the experience of many bereaved is that eventually they enjoy the holidays again. Hold onto HOPE and remember healing takes time.