

One of the most frequently asked questions this time of year is: “How do I get through the holidays?”

Unfortunately, for those who are grieving, there is no easy answer. And there's no one answer, as each person grieves and manages grief individually.

The celebrations and expectations of the season can feel overwhelming when someone you love has died, but take heart: You can make it through the holidays. No doubt, the season will be different. It also can be meaningful. Here are some tips that have helped others like you during the holidays and beyond.



Tips for Managing the Holidays when You Are Grieving

Plan for the actual holiday. Often, the anticipation of the day is worse than the experience. Express your wishes, what you expect and what you can and cannot do, to friends and family. These people also may be grieving and unsure of how to approach the day. Communicating ahead can ease stress for everyone.

Plan to observe the holidays in ways that are meaningful to you. You may wish to honor traditions or to do things completely different from past holidays. What matters is honoring your own wishes.

Be gentle with yourself. The holidays can be stressful for anyone, but when someone you love has died, you carry the additional stress that may come with grieving. Show yourself kindness, avoid taking on extra responsibility or tasks that may create anxiety.

Honor and remember your loved one. This will look different for everyone, and it may be difficult or bittersweet as you remember past holidays. Remembering helps keep loved ones close.

Spend time with people who allow you to grieve. Allow others to support and comfort you. Let the people in your life know what you need and what is helpful or not at all. Avoid those who tell you what you “should” be doing.

Spend some time alone, but do not isolate yourself. Taking “down time” is an important part of caring for yourself. Withdrawing totally from family and friends can make grief more overwhelming, so try to keep a good balance.

Do what is right for you and not what others expect. Others in your life, however well meaning, may try to dictate what your holiday experience should look like. Trust yourself and give yourself permission to honor your wishes.

Seek the help of a professional. Talking with a professional counselor can be extremely helpful in understanding your grief and the varying emotions you may experience during the holiday season. It is okay and natural to have times of enjoyment and happiness in the midst of grief as you remember and connect with family and friends.

Plan to care for yourself during and following the holiday season. Enjoy the food and drink of the season in moderation. Drink plenty of water and eat healthy lean protein for energy. Work in some type of exercise, even a 20-minute walk. Allow yourself to experience emotions as they come.

Plan for the winter months following the holidays. As friends and family return to normal routines, it is not uncommon to feel a let-down. You may talk with a professional counselor, put dates with friends on the calendar or schedule good self-care appointments, such as massage.

Remember, there is no one way to grieve. Be compassionate and kind to yourself, and seek others who can support you during this time. Wishing you peace along this journey.

