

COPING WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

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- Young people and adults generally follow the same approach to coping with grief. However, the intensity of grief may vary. Disbelief and shock will probably be followed by crying, then anger, and later, a period of helpless dependence. Finally, after a period of grieving, a person accepts the loss. The best thing a family member or friend can do is stay close to a grieving person and let him/her express what they feel.
- Whatever your age, whoever has died, whatever the cause of death, holidays lived in the absence of someone dear can be difficult times.
- If you're like most people you have many questions about grief. It is important to know at the outset that there are no universal "right" or "wrong" answers
- If you are facing your first holiday without the one who has been so close to you, a good starting point is with this awareness: chances are it will be a painful time and you may wonder how you are going to make it through it.
- It is important to remember that you cannot be rushed through your grief. Some people may insist on continually cheering you up and other may give you advice about what you should and should not do or how you should and should not feel – only you know how you feel.
- As much as possible and if you are able, own up to the fact that something terribly important has happened in your life.

If you are grieving, it may seem impossible to face the holiday celebrations. The following suggestions are offered to help you through them:

1. Be realistic about the holidays. Don't have the expectation they will produce that magical feeling or be a solution to your problems.

2. Accept the reality of your grief. Allow your feelings to be what they are and feel them without suppression. Cry as much as you need to. Understand that the holidays will seem to intensify your sense of loss.
3. Look for the good in your life. Feel your gratitude for those things you value such as health, family, friends, job, school, or whatever you value and appreciate. Write them down so you can refer to them whenever you feel there is nothing positive in your life.
4. Take extra good care of yourself. Eat a balanced meal, minimize sugar, alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine which can increase depression and lower your immune system. Get plenty of rest and don't overload your limits or your obligations. Take time for yourself to do what nurtures you, alone or with someone else of your choosing.
5. Lower your expectations of what you think you "should" or "ought to" do during the holiday season.
6. Choose to be with the people that can support you. Try and make special plans for the special days in advance. Decide if you want to be with your family, leave town, or if you want to volunteer somewhere.
7. Find someone to confide in who can truly understand what you are going through. A grief support group can be invaluable during the holidays (or anytime) to offer support, suggestions, and even companionship. Someone who has "been there" can usually provide the sensitive understanding that even a close and well meaning family member cannot. Ask for help or companionship when you feel you need it.
8. Create a simple memorial ritual for special days to honor the person who has died: light a candle, plant a flower, visit a special place, make a donation.

9. Maintain and even cultivate a sense of humor. Try not to take the holidays, or any day too seriously. If you find life becoming too serious or intense, have a good laugh. Laughing is a great way to release tension and stress.

10. Rely on your source of spiritual support in your own personal way. Take time to nurture that which sustains your definition of Love and Truth in the highest sense.