



Managing Grief During the Holidays

The holidays are a busy time, full of joyful gatherings of family and friends, a time of reflection and fond memories. But for those who have experienced the death of a loved one, the holidays can seem much more daunting, especially stressful and lonely.

While it may be a struggle, there are things that can be done to ease the grief and make coping less difficult. The National Funeral Directors Association offers the following suggestions for the bereaved to help them better cope with the holiday season:

Take care of yourself, both physically and mentally. Don't be afraid to set limits. The holiday season is busy enough that it can exhaust anyone, but if you are shouldering an extra burden of grief, it only makes it more unappealing. Get enough sleep, eat well, and take time out for yourself. Think about what family traditions you want to take part in, and what may be too much, and don't be afraid to say no to activities that may overwhelm you.

Find ways to soothe yourself. When under stress, we need to be willing to indulge ourselves sometimes. We each have differing ways to calm our troubled souls. Think about what you have historically done to take care of yourself. Go ahead and give in to some soothing activities as long as they aren't destructive to yourself or others.

Share your memories with others. Speaking about your loved ones and sharing remembrances can often help alleviate some of the pain of the season. If it helps, take part in a memorial or remembrance service at your local place of worship or family funeral home. Spending time with others who understand what you're going through is often a great source of comfort.

Honor the memory of your loved one. Acknowledge their importance to you and create ceremonies that express that awareness. Through thoughts, feelings, traditions and ceremonies you can express some of the grief that you feel and gain some comfort. Rituals may be easier for some of your friends to share, so make use of them. Or you may find comfort in developing new traditions that honor the memory of your loved one. A contribution to charity, a day of volunteering in honor of your memories, or a visit to the grave may be useful.

Plan activities and ways to stay busy (or keep from being too busy). Find the right mixture of activity and freedom from unnecessary stress. You can review your own needs and decide how to plan. If you can't stand the idea of being alone, you could plan activities with others. If you find being alone valuable and your holiday season is usually set at a frantic pace with social obligations, you could reconsider and cancel some of the get-togethers.

Above all, do what's right for you. Your family and friends care about you, and will likely offer advice about what they think is best for the grieving process. Don't forget to do what feels most comfortable for *you*. If volunteering at a local hospital or food pantry helps you heal, then seek out opportunities in the community. If stepping back from a more active role in your family's celebratory activities is the best way, let them know. It is perfectly natural to need time and space to honor your feelings, and the memory of your loved one. But don't forget to seek out your family and friends for support. You are not alone.

Courtesy of: Rose Cottage Hand Along the Way program

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