



Hope for the Holidays

— Coping with Grief during the Holidays —

You Are Not Alone

Grief can feel isolating in a season filled with joy and tradition. Connecting with others who understand — family, friends, faith communities or support groups — can bring comfort and hope.

Talk About Your Grief

Avoiding grief will not make it fade. Sharing your feelings openly and including your loved one's name in conversations can help you as you continue to process your loss. Seek out people who will listen with care and compassion.

Be Patient and Realistic

High expectations can intensify pain and frustration. This season will look different. Be kind and gentle with yourself, and realistic of what you expect. Release the word "should" and give yourself permission to do what feels right for you this season.

Do What Is Right for You

Well-meaning friends or family may have ideas about what is best for you, but your needs matter most. Take time to consider and discover what feels right and share it with trusted loved ones.

Honor Your Limits

Grief can bring fatigue and lower your capacity. Rest when needed, say no without guilt and allow yourself to move at your own pace.

Adapt Cherished Traditions

Traditions can change. Give yourself permission to do what feels manageable — whether it is one small ritual or none at all. Whatever you choose is enough.

Eliminate Unnecessary Stress

Be mindful to not overextend yourself this season. Give yourself permission to say no to invitations or gatherings when needed. Balance time with others and time alone. Staying busy will not erase grief — find the rhythm that works for you.

Plan Ahead for Traditions and Gatherings

Decide which traditions and gatherings to continue, which to pause and what new rituals to try. Keep plans flexible in case your needs shift.

Grief Is Unique

Each person in your family, including children, will grieve in their own way and have different needs this season. Creating space to share and discuss those needs can help you support one another.

Adapted from "Hope for the Holidays" by Elara Caring Hospice Foundation



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— Holiday Activities for Grieving Families —

Ways to acknowledge and honor your loved one this season.

Light a candle in their memory at holiday gatherings or at home.

Set a place at the table or leave an empty chair to symbolize their presence.

Hang a special ornament with their name, picture or something that reminds you of them.

Create a “love chain” with memories or messages on paper links to hang on the tree or around the house.

Create a memory box or stocking where family members can place written notes, memories or drawings.

Cook or bake their favorite dish and share it during a meal.

Play their favorite holiday music or a song that reminds you of them.

Share stories and memories during family gatherings to continue their legacy.

Donate or volunteer in their honor to a cause or charity meaningful to them.

Take a walk together with loved ones or participate in an activity they enjoyed, dedicating it to their memory.

Display a photo in a visible place during the season.

Start a new tradition each year that honors their life (planting a tree, reading a special poem or giving a small gift in their honor).

Create a holiday craft (wreath, ornament or scrapbook page) together as a family in their memory.

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— Checklist to Prepare for the Holiday —

Spend time as a family reviewing your holiday traditions and decide where to focus your energy this year. Some traditions may need to be paused, adapted or replaced with new ones that feel right for this season. Give yourselves permission to ask for what you need and to support one another as you navigate the holidays.

Check what you would be capable and interested in doing this year with a “✓” and what you do not have capacity for or are not interested in this year with an “X”:

Holiday Cards

- Mail as usual
- Shorten your list
- Skip cards this year
- Other _____

Decorations

- Decorate as usual
- Modify your decorations
- Ask for help
- Let others decorate this year
- Make changes
- Have a special decoration for your loved one
- Eliminate decorations this year
- Other

Shopping

- Shop as usual
- Do not exchange gifts
- Ask for help
- Shop early
- Shop online only
- Make your gifts
- Other

Holiday Dinner

- Prepare as usual
- Go out for dinner
- Invite friends over
- Eat alone
- Accept invitations for dinner
- Change dinner routine and traditions
- Other

Traditions

- Keep the old traditions
- Attend holiday parties
- Do not attend holiday parties
- Go to a new place
- Bake the usual holiday food
- Do not bake the usual holiday food
- Attend religious services
- Do not attend religious services
- Modify attending religious services
- Visit your loved one's resting place
- Open gifts as usual
- Stay in town or travel
- Other

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— Preparing for the Holidays —

Use the following guide to personally reflect and/or begin talking as a family about the upcoming holiday season. Sometimes identifying potential areas that may cause extra stress beforehand can help you prepare ways to care for yourself and each other.

What are you anxious about this holiday season? _____

How do you anticipate handling what makes you anxious? _____

What are your expectations of yourself this holiday season? _____

What is your perception on what others expect of you this holiday season? _____

Who are some people you can lean on during this holiday season for support? _____

What has been the hardest part of this holiday season so far? _____

What can you do to care for yourself this holiday season? _____

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