

Survival Strategies for the Holiday Season

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Be kind to yourself.

Holidays, traditionally a time of celebration, can be difficult for people grieving. Honoring yourself, your needs, and your feelings may be all you can manage right now. Do only as much as you can. Choose what's best for you—to be immersed in the holiday spirit or not.

Express your feelings.

The surest road through grief is to feel it. Cry if you need to cry, rage if you need to rage. Allow the longings, loneliness, or whatever you feel.

Ask for what you need.

Speak up! Others don't know what to say or do unless you tell them what would help you most. Say if you want to talk, or you want your privacy respected, if you need companionship, or if you want a shoulder to cry on.

Create support for yourself.

Sharing your pain eases it. Supportive people and groups help. Most of us cope best with tough times with someone to walk with us through our pain.

Appreciate your other loved ones.

It is natural to isolate yourself and feel alone in your grief. Don't deprive your children, spouse, and other loved ones of you. They need your love too. In return, their love can nourish you and help you begin to heal.

Help another person in need.

Contributing to someone else gets your attention off yourself and can be a very effective way of healing after a loss. When you are immersed in someone else's needs, you can be free temporarily of your own pain.

Resolve how to spend the holidays:

Avoid the holidays.

If celebrating seems too difficult, then you can choose not to observe the holidays. Go away somewhere—like skiing, a resort, or a different city. If you cannot afford to travel, then change the scenery—go to the zoo or the movies or some other distracting place. This may not erase your pain, but it may lessen it some.

Do something new and different.

Often, the more we try to recreate the past, the more obvious is our loss. Changing traditions can be freeing and satisfying. If imagining a new holiday plan is difficult, then give the job to a creative friend or relative.

You will survive the holidays.

You may hurt, but you will survive. The holidays may be the worst of your grief time. Eventually you will heal, and your memories will persist without pain. It is okay not have a good time. If you are hurting, and unable or unwilling to have your attention on anything else, let yourself be.

It is also okay to have a good time.

While grieving, we often feel guilty about having fun. Don't deny yourself life because someone has died. If you can, enjoy the holidays and every day. Death teaches us that every day of life is precious. The best gift we can give ourselves is to live wholeheartedly.