

# Grief Notes

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## Handling Holidays and Special Times by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

As the adjustments to life without a loved one continue, the anticipation and excitement for the holiday season and special times with family and friends may not be the same as years past. For those who have recently experienced a loss, the holidays may instead bring overwhelming sadness. The holiday events and family gatherings that you have looked forward to in the past may now be difficult to participate in or even attend at all. This can also be true in the case of other special times throughout the year, such as birthdays and anniversaries. Your greatest fear is that participating in such special times will intensify feelings of sadness.

It's important to remember, however, that grief has no time limit and impacts everyone quite differently. It is essential to recognize that your path is unique. While grief has no determined ending, the way we experience it changes with each new day. Grief can become less painful when we learn how to care for ourselves during vulnerable times. Here are some key self-care practices that can assist with personal grief, especially during the holiday season.

### 1. Be Kind to Yourself

It is important to allow yourself to experience various emotions without judgment. These emotions will come and go as you navigate through the grieving process but are often magnified during these special times. Be patient with yourself. Take the time you need to process being with family and friends and then do so when you feel ready.

### 2. Take Care of Yourself

Grief can easily interfere with your daily activities. Make sure you are taking time to eat well and get much-needed rest. Don't feel forced to participate in the stress associated with shopping and the holiday crowds if you don't feel you are able. You don't have to attend all the holiday parties or even put up decorations if you don't feel ready. Openly and honestly share with others how you are feeling so you are not pressured to participate in everything.

### 3. Seek Help

It is essential to be aware of how you are doing emotionally. If you start experiencing overwhelming feelings of depression or hopelessness, it is important that you seek professional help. Establish a safety plan, which

includes alerting a family member or friend when you don't feel safe. Grief is an understandably painful experience, but you don't have to go through it alone. There is support to help you manage it.

### 4. Get Involved

Helping others can be a way to stay connected while also bringing new meaning to the holiday season. Try connecting with those who are also experiencing grief and loss or contribute to an organization that helps others. Don't feel guilty for briefly setting aside your feelings of grief. Grieving has periods of highs and lows.

### 5. Make These Special Days Your Own

It is OK to experience the holiday in whatever manner you feel best. You might celebrate with traditions, not celebrate at all, or create new traditions and memories. Remember, while holiday movies and greeting cards render images of blissfulness, the reality is that the holidays are difficult for many. You are not alone and can create your own holiday experience.