

Managing Grief During the Holidays – Ask an Expert

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Grief is anything that causes deep sorrow or loss. It can be the death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, or anything that causes sadness and a change of lifestyle. Grief during the holidays can be exacerbated by expectations of how things are “supposed” to be.

Physical signs of grief may include trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth, decreased or increased sleeping or eating, and other challenges. Emotional signs may consist of deep sadness or sorrow, crying, and general moodiness. Everyone manages grief differently and at their own pace, so be patient with yourself and others as they go through the process.

To manage loss and grief during the holidays, it's important to recognize that things will be different, and you shouldn't be afraid to talk about it. If dad always carved the turkey or mom made the pies and they're not around to do it anymore, it's different. One of the best ways to help acknowledge it is simply to talk about it ahead of time. If you wait to talk about it during the event, emotions can run high. Talking about it before can help defuse that.

Consider these ideas to help yourself or others work through grief during the holidays.

- Don't assume you know how everyone feels, and respect each other's feelings. If things get heated, take a break so you have time away. Grief is different for each person.
- Make an ornament with a photo or another item that reminds you of your loved one.

- Have family and friends write a message on a balloon and release it during the holidays.
- Display a photograph of the loved one or leave an empty seat at the table to remember them.
- Have a moment of silence or celebration where everyone goes around the room and talks about the loved one.
- Volunteer or provide service in a loved one's name. There are many opportunities available.
- Choose to let some traditions go and create new ones.
- Don't feel bad if you need to avoid a situation that is too difficult right now. Perhaps it's too hard to go to a large holiday meal, and you would feel better having your own meal at a place you used to go with your loved one.
- Be supportive and respectful of individual methods of grieving. Invite those grieving to events, but don't push. Be prepared for their plans to change.
- Send heartfelt letters or cards of support.
- Listen to those who are grieving without minimizing, judging, or giving advice. Be a quiet sounding board.
- Remember that grief has no time limit. Just because someone got through last holiday season doesn't mean it will be easy this year. It could be, but don't be disappointed if it is not.
- Talk to a trusted friend or family member about your grief. If you need further help, contact a therapist or grief counselor. A professional can help you understand and deal with the trauma of grief and get back to your daily life, likely sooner than you could on your own. Be sure the person you choose is on your insurance plan. [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) lists psychologists in your zip code area, then you can cross-reference that to the providers who are on your insurance plan.
- Look for a support group that offers assistance and comfort for those dealing with grief.
- Search for credible information on grief from licensed professionals. Trusted sources include the American Counseling Association and the American Psychiatric Association.
- If you know someone who has had a recent loss, check on them regularly so they know they are not alone.

The video “[Managing Grief During the Holidays](#)” has further tips and information.

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