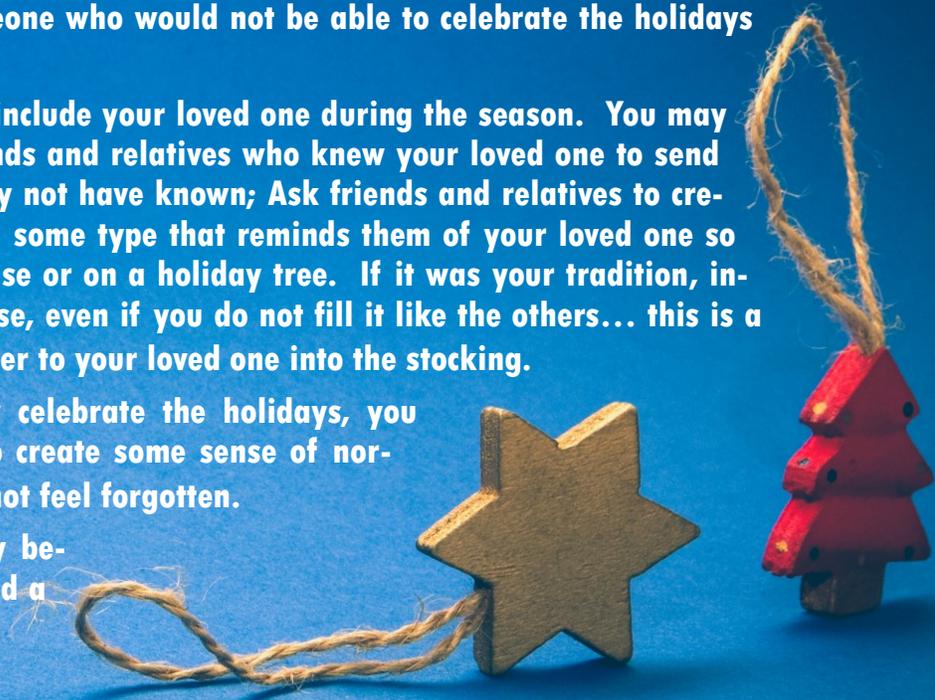


# Surviving the Holidays

The holidays are among the most difficult times for bereaved families. Below are some helpful suggestions that may aid you in surviving the holidays.

- Call a family meeting and discuss your plans for the holiday season, understanding that it would be unusual for you not to feel emotionally, physically and psychologically drained. Don't set your expectations too high or you may find yourself disappointed.
- Well intending friends and family members may want to include you in their plans, believing it best for you to "get away" from grieving your loss. They do not understand that you cannot escape the grief that you feel.
- There is no obligation to say "yes". Only participate if you truly want to.
- Try to take care of your health. It's important that you eat and drink properly, exercise and get plenty of rest.
- Take time to do the things YOU want to do. You may want time alone to reflect or to write your thoughts.
- Consider eliminating such things as the festive decorations, cooking and baking that you may normally enjoy.
- People will understand if you're not in a merry or joyous mood or simply don't have the energy. You may try placing an electric candle in your window in memory of your child. Don't feel obligated to send out holiday cards.
- If it is necessary for you to buy gifts, consider ordering them over the Internet or by phone. Most who are bereaved find it draining to go out and fight through crowded stores bustling with holiday cheer.
- Many families who are mourning may use the money they would have spent on gifts for their loved one to buy gifts for someone who would not be able to celebrate the holidays otherwise.
- It is not unusual for you to want to include your loved one during the season. You may want to do something like: Ask friends and relatives who knew your loved one to send you a story about them that you may not have known; Ask friends and relatives to create an ornament or remembrance of some type that reminds them of your loved one so that you can place it around the house or on a holiday tree. If it was your tradition, include placing a stocking in your house, even if you do not fill it like the others... this is a symbolic gesture; place a card or letter to your loved one into the stocking.
- If you have children who normally celebrate the holidays, you may consider continuing to do so to create some sense of normalcy in the house and so they will not feel forgotten.
- Most families find some comfort by being with others who have experienced a similar loss.
- Be kind to yourself.
- It is okay to cry.



# 8 Holiday Rules for Surviving the Holidays

1. **Do it your way...** For some griever keeping old traditions brings comfort, for others doing things "as usual" is painful. We are all different and what works for you may not work for somebody else. So, be true to yourself.

2. **Rules are meant to be bent or broken...** Others in your life may try to "guilt" you into participating in an event or custom that you've always been a part of. While it may be important to them that you do not break tradition, let them know that it will take time for you to resolve what traditions you are able to keep, alter or do away with completely and that old rules DO NOT apply to new grief.

3. **Pencils work better than pens...** anticipation of Holidays and special events can often be more stressful than the events themselves. When considering accepting an invitation to a Holiday event, ask the host to "pencil" you in and let them know that your participation will depend on how well you are doing the day of the event. If you are pressed to give a definitive answer, trust your instincts when choosing to say yes or no. Pencils are best; just make sure you have an eraser close at hand.

4. **Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone...** Many people will try to cheer you up and try to find a silver lining to your grief. Expect cheesy clichés and well intentioned, bad advice from others who see your grief and tears as rain on their Holiday parade. Once again, be true to yourself, because masks are for Halloween and Halloween has passed.

5. **Let people know you aren't "expecting"...** Expectations begin with you, so don't put big expectations about how well you will handle the Holidays or how much you will be able to participate in the Holidays. But on the flip side don't over estimate how difficult it may be. Grief during the Holidays can fluctuate wildly, you will have some good days... when you feel like you can function and you will have some bad days... when you feel the pain is unbearable. Expect the unexpected.

6. **It's my "pity" and I'll cry if I want to...** Tears are our tribute to our beautiful loved ones and nothing is more healing or makes us feel closer to them than when we cry. The Holiday season will surely touch every emotion and flood you with memories of happy times in the past. Throw yourself a pity party whenever you feel like it... a time to just sit with your memories and cry if you want to.

7. **Take care of yourself...** When in doubt, choose to nurture yourself and be kind to you. Take ample time to do what you enjoy or what brings you peace. If it's exercise, reading, meditation, shopping or simply sitting alone with your thoughts. The Holiday season is the most stressful time of year for most grieving people, take extra care of YOU and YOUR needs.

8. **Giving is the gift that keeps on giving...** Healing begins when we help others. Many griever find that reaching out and helping the lonely and those less fortunate can be a great source of comfort during this season. Some will buy gifts for complete strangers or fulfill a needy child's Christmas Wish List. We know from experience that serving others during the Holidays gives us more healing than anything else we've ever tried.

So, if you're up to it, start new traditions of volunteerism or helping to make somebody else's Holiday a little brighter. It just might lighten your load and brighten your Holidays, just a little bit. ~

Written By: Alan and Denise Pedersen

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