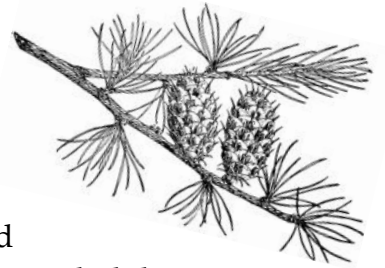


# Getting Through the Holidays



The thought of facing the holidays after going through the last several months is daunting. It's been a time of separation from our community, friends, family. Many of us, even if we are not actively grieving, feel lonely and depressed. Now we face that time of year where we will be inundated with cheery holiday music, heartfelt television movies and festivities. These serve as painful reminders of everything we've lost, and of all those who suffered alone. So here we stand, in a gap. The holidays will never be as they were. Lots of change, different than ever before. There are ways we can help ourselves cope with our loss. Establish some new ground rules, if need be, while muddling through this new way of life, not only because of our loss but because of the restrictions that come with the pandemic. Here are some thoughts.

1. Don't overextend yourself taking on too many preparations and responsibilities. Bereavement is a great excuse. Use it liberally as you need to.
2. Feel comfortable with what you're doing and your decisions. If friends or family extend invitations to cheer you up, weigh each invitation, take care of your needs and if you feel any angst, just reply, "No thank you!" Don't ever hesitate to say it.
3. It's your holiday, you decide how you want to spend it. Your terms.
4. Getting rest, exercise and proper nutrition is important.
5. Feel free to express your grief and your loneliness. Share your feelings with someone who will listen and understand.
6. If you take on any holiday tasks, ask for help. Letting someone else lend a hand can be rewarding and satisfying for them as well as yourself.
7. Maybe you can help someone else. This can allow you to focus on someone else's needs, freeing you of your own for a bit. It's ok if you can't. Don't fret or be hard on yourself. You'll be able to at another time.
8. If you have the opportunity to laugh and enjoy yourself, DO IT! Bereavement doesn't mean you can't have some fun. Don't deprive yourself, and never feel guilty!
9. Technology can feel overwhelming on a good day, but it is a great tool and not as difficult as you might think and can help you feel less alone. Using Zoom or Facetime are free and easy to set up on your phone or computer. Ask a friend or one of the family to walk you through it. It may take some time to get used to. Don't worry about asking for help more than once or twice.
10. Remember that everyone is isolated right now. Do you have a friend that is also stuck alone? You can set up a "pod," a few people who agree to not expose themselves to a lot of people other than perhaps grocery shopping. You can still share a cup of coffee and conversation by sitting 6 feet apart and/or wearing your masks.

Many grieving families have shared how they've remembered their loved ones in special, meaningful ways and how it has helped ease their own feelings of loss. We've listed some of their ideas. Perhaps some of them will spark your interest or inspire you, to come up with your own unique expression of remembrance. It can help you get through these tough times.

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## *Helpful suggestions from those living with grief*

“Do a family and/or friends Zoom and call it “sharing some memories.” Talk about special gifts that you gave or received from your loved one. Do a show and tell! Share the silly or special things he or she always said or did during the holidays.”

“Start some new traditions in memory of the family member who died. Perhaps a special prayer or poem, a distinctive ornament or decoration, lighting a candle. Something specific to that special individual. And of course, mention his or her name frequently.”

“Break out and dust off all those family albums! Photographs are a wonderful way of remembering. Copy them onto your phone and send them to everyone! Then have conversations about the good old days, Nana’s best cranberry sauce and how after the big feast all the men napped while the football game played on. There will be some pangs, tears and sadness at first, but they will be followed by laughter which will help bring on the healing.”

“It was hard for me to continue some of our holiday traditions that we shared as a couple. Especially attending a concert, walking through the woods after the first snow. Well, concerts are not possible right now, so I’ll listen to our favorite music, maybe sip a glass of wine and reminisce. Perhaps I’ll invite my dear friend to walk with me in the woods.”

“My husband loved giving and receiving gifts. I kept coming up with ideas for his presents, things he would love. I decided to make a memorial donation to his favorite nonprofit. It felt good. He hated coconut, but every holiday he bought me a coconut cream pie. So, I’m going to buy one for myself and attack it with a very large spoon.”

Finding the balance, so we can at least “survive” the holiday, is a task. Get through it, however you can, do whatever you need to for YOU during this grieving process.

“The first year I changed everything. I spent the day alone, took a long bath, had pizza for dinner, gave my pets rare special treats, and read a book that I had been wanting to finish for a long time. Before I knew it, Christmas was over and I was able to return to what would become my normal life. My following Christmas was completely different. It was important in my grief to go on strike that first year. I did what I had to do to cope and it worked.”

Hopefully some of these ideas will help get you through these challenging times. We can’t recreate the past, and we can’t change what has happened in our lives. We can find creative ways to take the best possible care of ourselves while we walk through our time of grief and bereavement.

Whatever you decide, it should be your decision based on your need. Do the same or completely turn it upside down. Make changes where you see fit. Be sure that you don’t do anything that makes you uncomfortable or is more than you can manage. Loss changes our lives even more than we realize. Accepting and respecting those changes, and knowing we are not the same, helps us make the one who died an important and meaningful presence in the holidays while we nurture ourselves at the same time.