



coping through the
HOLIDAYS

“Grief and love are sisters, woven together from the beginning. Their kinship reminds us that there is no love that does not contain loss and no loss that is not a reminder of the love we carry for what we once held close.”

— Francis Weller

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a sprig of greenery, likely a branch of a small evergreen or a similar festive plant. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the fingers gently gripping the branch. The background is a dark, textured wooden surface, possibly a table or a wall. Several cinnamon sticks are scattered across the background, adding to the holiday theme. A portion of a wreath made of similar greenery is visible on the right side. The overall lighting is warm and soft, creating a cozy and inviting atmosphere.

Coping Through The Holidays



Holidays have such rich associations for us because humankind created them as a way to honour and celebrate that which is truly important.



Whether you are in the midst of celebrating your own traditions with family and friends or surrounded by the festivities of others, your grief may reappear.



If ever there was a time to treat yourself like a cherished friend, this is it.



Tips for Coping

#1

Give yourself space to feel your true feelings

#2

Ask friends and family to support you in making plans that you can change according to your needs.

#3

Consider cutting back on your holiday traditions, or shifting them.

#4

If you have a faith community, reach out for help to find support. Are there traditions or wisdom within your spirituality or value system that relates to loss? Some people find personal rituals, and spiritual or communal practices to be important resources in grieving.

#5

Create something tangible to remember your person: make a special decoration, light a special candle, and give it a place of honour.

#6

Talk with other bereaved people, or with friends and family members who've experienced losses.

A close-up of a black microphone with a silver mesh grille, positioned vertically. The background is a blurred crowd of people in a dimly lit room with warm, yellowish light sources, creating a bokeh effect.

Talking with loved ones



Although your loved ones may be grieving the same person's death, each of you have a unique relationship with the person who died.



Consider connecting with your loved ones prior to special days and holidays so that you can prepare and strategize ahead of time.

#1

Acknowledge the work it takes to prepare for events. Discuss how you want to handle the changes of duties, routines, and roles.

#2

Acknowledge and adjust your expectations. Loved ones may not be able to support one another as they have in the past.

#3

Try to tell those around you what you need, since they want to show they care, but may not know how.

#4

Acknowledge and honour the fact that the occasion may be painful at times. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel.

#5

Both/and: you can be grateful AND sad. You can be happy to see loved ones, and also feel lost or lonely.

#6

When planning gatherings, explore how to include acknowledgment or memories of the person who has died.



Children and Youth



Children and youth may also experience changes in their grief during special days and holidays – but your child may not have difficulty with the same days that you do and may not share the same reactions or feelings. Ask about their thoughts and feelings. Find out what is most important and remember to include your child when making any plans.



What part of this day/event is most important to you?

What about this day/ event do you think might be hard for you?

How would you like to remember the person who died on this occasion?

Is there any part of this day that you don't want to participate in?



The New Year



Whether you are facing the start of a new calendar year or the beginning of your second year of bereavement, the "New Year" may bring unexpected feelings.



You might have been looking forward, anticipating the relief, 'healing' and improved well-being you were going to feel at having made it through the difficult times. The New Year might not live up to expectations, and you may find yourself feeling anxious, apprehensive or let down.



Tips for The New Year

#1

Review the past year – the ups, downs, accomplishments, challenges and 'gifts' that helped get you through.

#2

Don't compare your grief or happiness to that of others.

#3

Consider joining a bereavement support group to provide predictable relational support in your grief.

#4

Give yourself permission to not be your 'usual self', and to take time off. Allow yourself to do things differently – and know you don't need to "move on".

#5

Acknowledge that you are doing the best you can.

#6

Allow a place in your life for your grief. Amidst the activities and demands of everyday life, plan restorative time alone or with supportive others.



Caring for Yourself



Holidays are usually times filled with memories, and you may feel especially tender and vulnerable.
Caring for yourself can be another way of honouring the person who died.



Sometimes, the more we need to take care of ourselves, the less we do it.

You may notice that you don't care very much about yourself. Or you may believe giving to yourself is selfish or find it uncomfortable.



Expect your feelings to change, perhaps without much warning. There may be times when you feel sad, angry, or frustrated. You may feel loneliness and powerful longing for the person who has died. At other times, you may experience joy and laughter or enjoy yourself for a few moments – and then feel guilty.

Remind yourself that this is all part of the grieving process.

For Grief

by John O'Donohue

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you gets fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence.

Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.
There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.

Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning,
You are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.
More than you, it knows its way
And will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief
Until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And, when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time

Candle Lighting Ceremony

As we light this candle in your honour,

We light this candle for our sadness

We light this candle for our memories

We light this candle for our determination

We light this candle for our love



How The Light Comes

by Jan Richardson

I cannot tell you
how the light comes.

What I know
is that it is more ancient
than imagining.

That it travels
across an astounding expanse
to reach us.

That it loves
searching out
what is hidden,
what is lost,
what is forgotten
or in peril
or in pain.

That it has a fondness
for the body,
for finding its way
toward flesh,
for tracing the edges
of form,
for shining forth
through the eye,
the hand,
the heart.

I cannot tell you
how the light comes,
but that it does.

That it will.
That it works its way
into the deepest dark
that enfolds you,
though it may seem
long ages in coming
or arrive in a shape
you did not foresee.

And so
may we this day
turn ourselves toward it.
May we lift our faces
to let it find us.
May we bend our bodies
to follow the arc it makes.
May we open
and open more
and open still

to the blessed light
that comes.

Community Engagement

Discussion Groups

Letter writing

Collaborative art therapy

Books

Refreshments



#1

What's a memory with your deceased that comes to mind, from the holiday season?

#2

Have you started any new traditions in honour of your loved one?

#3

What are some ways you have found support from friends, family or other areas over the holiday season?

#4

Are you taking something away from today, that you plan to try this holiday season?

#5

What is one thing you can offer yourself to help you get through this holiday season? Are you ready to commit to that, or would you need to ask for help?

"Grief has many moods and movements, shapes and textures. It is about how sorrow carves riverbeds in our soul, deepening us as it flows in and out of our lives. There is something familiar about the rising and falling of loss, how it takes us below the surface of our lives and works on us in some alchemical way. We are remade in times of grief, broken apart and reassembled. It is hard, painful, and unbidden work. No one goes in search of loss; rather, it finds us and reminds us of the temporary gift we have been given, these few sweet breaths we call life."

-Francis Weller from The Wild Edge of Sorrow

Lost and weary traveler

Searching for the way to go

Stranger, heavy-hearted

Longing for someone to know

May you find a light

May you find a light

May you find a light to guide you home

There are weary travelers

Searching everywhere you go

Strangers who are searching

Longing deeply to be known

May you find a light

May you find a light

May you find a light to guide you home



thank you