



'...no-one should be alone in grief'

TIPS FOR HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Special occasions such as anniversaries, birthdays and holidays can be challenging after a loved one has died and can raise painful feelings and memories. It is often the anticipation of these events and what you imagine you might experience that can be harder than the day itself. Talking to others and making some plans can be a helpful thing to do. Others may feel differently to you and it is important to allow each person to mark occasions in their own way also.

Follow your intuition and do what feels best for you. There is no right or wrong way to cope with Christmas. Sometimes it helps to make a decision and plan, but it is also okay to change your mind on the day. Here are some other ideas:

Decide what you can handle comfortably and let family and friends know. Give yourself permission not to do things that you are finding hard to do. Ask yourself: Can I handle the responsibility of holding a gathering or family dinner or shall I ask someone else to do it? Shall I stay here for the holidays or go to a completely different environment? Do I want to be with others or be alone? There is no right or wrong way. It is helpful to discuss it with others.

Make some changes if they feel comfortable for you. You may want to re-examine your priorities and traditions and decide to continue some traditions or develop new ones. Think about some of the tasks such as writing greeting cards, holiday baking, decorating, putting up a tree, hosting a family dinner and ask yourself and decide if this is something you still want to do. You may want to change things and do them differently, or maybe you could think about asking for help. Can you ask someone else to help you or to do the task instead?

Allow yourself to grieve. The days leading up to special events can heighten your grief. Feelings of loss are often magnified at this time and seeing other families celebrate can just hurt. Try not to expect too much of yourself. Know that in time that the experience of many bereaved persons is that they do come to enjoy holidays and other occasions again.

Allow yourself to express your feelings. It can help to share thoughts and feelings with someone. The need for support is often greater during these times. It's ok to cry and let people know that this is a hard time. Try not to shut yourself away or put on a happy face, let people know if you would appreciate company or someone to talk to.

Shopping for special occasions or events. If you decide to do shopping, make a list ahead of time and keep it for a day when you feel you are ready to do it, or shop through a catalogue or online. You may want to take someone with you.



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Look after yourself. Special occasions and holidays can be emotionally and physically draining. It is important to listen to your body. It is important to take good care of yourself physically and emotionally in the lead up to, and during, significant occasions. Eat well and listen to your body, e.g. if you are tired, make sure you get some rest. Likewise, make sure you take care of yourself emotionally. Try not to suppress your emotions, e.g. if you need to have a good cry, then do so, as you will likely feel better afterwards. You may also choose to avoid people at this time, particularly those who are unable to understand your experience of loss.

Don't be afraid to have fun. Give yourself and your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holidays. Happiness and sadness can co-exist, and laughter and joy are not disrespectful to the memory of your loved one.

Make a point of remembering your loved one in a special way. You may want to burn a special candle, hang a stocking in which people can put notes with their thoughts or feelings, place an ornament on the tree in memory, look at photographs or visit the cemetery. You can include your loved one on the day by listening to music that reminds you of them or setting a place at the table.

Talking about your loved one. You may want to think about if you want to talk about your loved one or not? You may find it comforting and want to let others know that it is okay to talk about your loved one and mention their name.

Consider doing something special for someone else. Donate a gift in the memory of your loved one. Donate money you would have spent on your loved one as a gift to charity. Adopt a needy family for the holidays. Invite a guest (foreign student, senior citizen) to share festivities.

Get Support. If you need more support, you can contact the following services for telephone support and online counselling.

Service	Contact details	
Griefline	Phone: 1300 845745 https://griefline.org.au/phone-counselling/	Grief helpline service that provides counselling support services free of charge to individuals and families who are experiencing loss and grief. Victoria only 12.00pm - 3.00am
Kids Helpline	Phone: 1800 55 1800 https://kidshelpline.com.au/	Kids Helpline provides telephone and online counselling for Australian children and young people aged between 5 and 25 years.
Lifeline	Phone: 13 11 14 https://www.lifeline.org.au/ National Bereaved by Suicide Line Phone: 1300 467 354	Lifeline provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.



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MensLine	Phone: 1300 78 99 78 https://mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/mensline-australia-online-counselling/	MensLine Australia offers 24/7 telephone support, information and referral service and online counselling, helping men to deal with relationship problems in a practical and effective way.
Suicide Callback Service	Phone: 1300 659 467 https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/	The Suicide Call Back Service provides telephone, video and online counselling to people at risk of suicide, carers of someone who is suicidal and those bereaved by suicide across Australia.
Suiceline Victoria	Phone: 1300 651 251 https://www.suiceline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/	SuicideLine Victoria is a 24/7 telehealth provider that offers free professional phone and online counselling for people living in Victoria.
RedNose	1300 308 307 www.rednosegriefandloss.com.au	Support for people who have had a baby or child die – from conception to 18 years

This fact sheet has been developed with reference to the work of the following organisations.

- griefnet.org <http://griefnet.org/library/tips.html>
- Support After Suicide <http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au/what-to-do/special-occasions>
- AFSP <https://afsp.org/handling-special-occasions/>
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement <https://www.grief.org.au/uploads/uploads/GriefAnniversariesSignificant%20Events.pdf>
- Red Nose Grief and Loss Support <https://rednosegriefandloss.org.au/support/article/getting-through-christmas-what-worked-for-us>
- The Compassionate Friends <https://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Coping-with-Christmas.pdf>
- My Grief Assist <https://www.mygriefassist.com.au/factsheets/factsheet-16-coping-with-grief-at-christmas/>