

Help for the Holidays

For anyone who has experienced loss, holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah or Diwali can be pretty tough. For those that grieve, celebrations and family gatherings have the capacity to heighten the absence of a family member or friend who is no longer there.

Here are six coping strategies to help manage the season.

1. Practice self-care

Give yourself permission to not live up to other people's expectations.

It's okay to say no.

Choose what is best for you and your family, whether it is to be with people or to spend time alone.

2. It's okay to ask for what you need

People may want to help but might not know what to do. Be specific and tell them what you need.

3. Create Support

Try to find people in your life that are willing to listen — not advise, fix or step into your story.

These are the people who know that the best thing they can do is just be there and support you through it.



4. The holidays are different now

You may choose to keep your holiday traditions intact or avoid celebrating altogether. It's really up to you. The only right way is what feels right for you. And remember that what you do this year isn't what will necessarily happen the next time.

Consider creating a meaningful ritual that honours your loved one.

5. Everyone grieves in their own way

Follow your heart and feelings when it comes to grieving. Through tears or laughter, honour whatever feelings you have.

6. Avoid additional stressors

Even when not facing grief, the holidays can bring added stress. Consider what is reasonable and give yourself permission to cut out what is not.

Adapted from North Coast Journal 2003; "When the Holidays Hurt" and "Surviving Holidays, Birthdays and Anniversaries" by Brook Noel