

THANKSGIVING GRATEFUL WHILE GRIEVING

By Fiastro

Thanksgiving can be a difficult time for people who have lost a loved one. Strong emotions often surface on Thanksgiving, including sorrow, anger, and frustration, and many people experience mixed emotions during the holidays. When the family gathers around the table for Thanksgiving dinner, it's impossible to miss the fact that someone is missing. The holiday resurrects memories of the role the deceased person played in family activities, and it can be painful to face the reality that they are no longer present.

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING AFTER A LOVED ONE'S PASSING CAN BE ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING. FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE GRIEVING A LOSS.

the holiday season is often accompanied by apathy and uncertainty. This feeling is sometimes described as “secondary loss” – the death of a family member or close friend is the primary loss, followed by a series of secondary losses such as loss of companionship, financial security, future plans, and even loss of quality time spent together during the holidays.

However, you can still acknowledge the absence of a loved one during Thanksgiving even if you are in mourning. Some families set aside a memorial place setting for their loved one(s) or recognize the loss some other way, e.g., cooking a favorite dish, lighting a candle, placing a picture on a chair, or reciting a special poem in remembrance of the deceased.



Others choose to create a new family tradition rather than keeping to the usual Thanksgiving arrangements by skipping the home-cooked turkey and having dinner at a restaurant. Here are some other ways people express thanks on Thanksgiving when coping with grief:

- **Share stories** – ask family members to share their favorite memories of a loved one. This can lift the mood of the occasion and you might even learn something new about the person who died.
- **Donate to a favorite charity** – make a contribution to a cause in honor of your loved one. You can choose a nonprofit that held special meaning to the deceased, or support an organization that provides Thanksgiving programs for people in need.
- **Volunteer** – helping others during the holidays is always appreciated. Invite family and friends to join you in volunteering at a hospital, senior home, or animal shelter and make it a group affair.



Grief or Gratitude?

There's no prescribed way of coping with grief during the holiday season (or at all, really). The key message here is that you don't have to choose between grief and gratitude during Thanksgiving.

YOU CAN STILL BE GRATEFUL EVEN IF YOU ARE GRIEVING. AND WHILE YOU MAY NOT FEEL ESPECIALLY THANKFUL. THAT'S ALRIGHT TOO.

It's okay to feel sad during the holidays – don't feel pressured to put on a happy face or act like you're enjoying the festivities if you're feeling blue. But keep in mind that grief is a journey – there are good days and bad days, sad moments, and opportunities for joy. You can still appreciate the special moments of Thanksgiving and mourn the loss of a loved one at the same time.



5 Things to Keep in Mind

1. It's Normal to Feel Indifference

It's very normal, after a death, to feel indifference and disinterest towards events and experiences which once brought you joy. That's not your fault. It's the way it is. Grief changes everything. You may feel like you're standing on the other side of the window, looking in, watching others feel happy while you feel sad.

It is okay to NOT feel grateful. After all, you've been dealt a pretty heavy blow when someone you love has died.

2. Give Gratefulness a Try

Even if you don't feel grateful, you could give it a try. You can acknowledge, even if only in a small way, the support you may have received from family and friends, gratefulness for an invitation to a holiday celebration, and gratefulness for having choices as to how to celebrate. You don't have to skip the holiday altogether.

3. Skip it

You can skip Thanksgiving if you really feel that you need to be alone. But if you're worried about looking sad while others are looking happy, don't let that stop you. Nobody expects you to be the life of the party; they're just glad for your presence.

4. Start Small

You can try to think of a few things for which you can give thanks. Start small. Think of one little thing that you are thankful for. Then another, then another. You may discover that while the unimaginable has happened in your life, some positives still exist or have come about.

5. Grief Triggers Appear Easily

Grief triggers can and will appear easily at Thanksgiving. Triggers can result from the people you're spending time with, the foods you are eating, conversation topics with the guests, and photo frames on view, to name a few. Take a deep breath, or excuse yourself for a moment, and allow the grief or the memory to be there.

