

Christmas Holidays



64 Tips for Coping

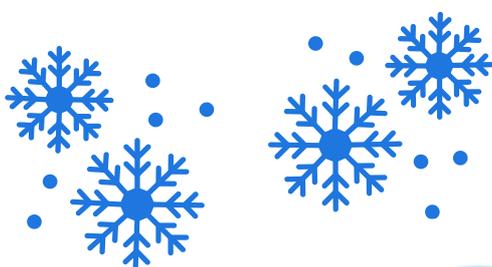
64 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Christmas Season

by: Litsa Williams



1. Acknowledge that the holidays will be different and hard.
2. *Decide which traditions you want to keep.*
3. Decide which traditions you want to change.
4. *Create a new tradition in memory of your loved one.*
5. Decide where you want to spend the holidays. You may want to switch up the location, or it may be of comfort to keep it the same. Either way, make a conscious decision about location.
6. *Plan ahead and communicate with the people you will spend the holiday with in advance, to make sure everyone is in agreement about traditions and plans.*
7. Remember that not everyone will be grieving the same way you are grieving.
8. *Remember that the way others will want to spend the holiday may not match how you want to spend the holiday.*
9. Put out a 'memory stocking', 'memory box', or another special place where you and others can write down memories you treasure. Pick a time to read them together.
10. *Light a candle in your home in memory of the person you've lost.*
11. Include one of your loved one's favorite dishes in your holiday meal.
12. *Be honest. Tell people what you DO and DON'T want to do for the holidays.*

13. Make a donation to a charity that was important to your loved one in their name.
14. Buy a gift you would have given to your loved one and donate it to a local charity.
15. If you are feeling really ambitious, adopt a family in memory of your loved one. This can often be done through a church, Salvation Army, or Goodwill.
16. See a counselor. Maybe you've been putting it off. The holidays are especially tough, so this may be the time to talk to someone.
17. Pick a few special items that belonged to your loved one and gift them to friends or family who will appreciate them.
18. Make a memorial ornament, wreath, or other decoration in honor of your loved one.
19. If you have been having a hard time parting with your loved one's clothing, use the holidays as an opportunity to donate some items to a homeless shelter or other charity.
20. Send a holiday card to friends of your loved one who you may regret having lost touch with.
21. Visit your loved one's gravesite and leave a grave blanket, wreath, poinsettia, or another meaningful holiday item.
22. Play your loved one's favorite holiday music.
23. If your loved one hated holiday music, that's okay! Play whatever music they loved.
24. Journal when you are having an especially bad day.
25. Skip holiday events if you are in holiday overload.
26. Don't feel guilty about skipping events if you're experiencing holiday overload!
27. Don't get trapped. When you go to holiday events, drive yourself so you can leave if it gets to be too much.
28. Pull out old photo albums and spend some time on the holiday looking at photos. Share with others if your up to it.



29. Talk to kids about the holidays. It can be confusing for kids that the holidays can be both happy and sad after a death. Let them know it is okay to enjoy the holiday, and it is okay to be sad.

30. Make a dish that your loved one used to make. Don't get discouraged if you try to make their dish and you fail. We've all been there (or, at least I've been there!).

31. Leave an empty seat at the holiday table in memory of your loved one.

32. If leaving an empty seat is too depressing, invite someone who doesn't have any family to spend the holiday with.

33. Don't send holiday cards this year if it is too sad or overwhelming.

34. Don't feel guilty about not sending holiday cards!

35. Create a 'dear photograph' with a photo of a holiday past.

36. Skip or minimize gifts. After a death, material things can seem less meaningful and the mall can seem especially stressful. Talk as a family and decide whether you truly want to exchange gifts this year.

37. Put out a photo table with photos of your loved one at holiday celebrations in the past.

38. Go to a grief group. When everyone looks so gosh-darn filled with holiday cheer, sometimes it is helpful to talk with others who are struggling.

39. Skip (or minimize) the decorations if they are too much this year. Don't worry, you'll see plenty of decorations outside your house.

40. Don't feel guilty if you skip or minimize the decorations!

41. Remember that crying is okay. The holidays are everywhere and who knows what may trigger a cry-fest. We've all been there and it's okay to cry (even if you are in the sock aisle at Walmart).

42. Volunteer in your loved one's memory.



43. Let your perfectionism go. If you always have the perfect tree, perfectly wrapped gifts, and perfect table, accept that this year may not be perfect and that is a-okay. I know this is easier said than done for you type-As, but give it a try.

44. Ignore people who want to tell you what you “should” do for the holiday. Listen to yourself, trust yourself, communicate with your family, and do what works for you.

45. Seek gratitude. I am the queen of holiday funks, so I know this is tough. But try to find one daily gratitude throughout the holiday season. Write it down, photograph it, share it on Facebook. Whatever. Just look for the little things.

46. Watch the food. Food can make us feel better in the short term (damn you, dopamine!) until we feel like crap later that we ate that whole tin of holiday cookies. Don't deprive yourself, but be careful that you don't let food become your holiday comfort.

47. Watch the booze. Alcohol can become a fast friend when we are grieving. If that holiday party is getting to be too much, head home instead of to the open bar.

48. If you are stressed about making the holiday dinner, ask someone else to cook or buy dinner this year.

49. If you are stressed about the crowds at the mall, cut back on gifts or do your shopping online.

50. Splurge on a gift for you. Grief can make us feel a little entitled and self-involved, and that is okay sometimes (within reason, of course). Splurge on a holiday gift for yourself this year... and make it a good one!

51. Say yes to help. There will be people who want to help and may offer their support. Take them up on their offers.

52. Ask for help. If people aren't offering, ask. This can be super-hard if it isn't your style, but it's important. Asking others to help with cooking, shopping, or decorating can be a big relief.



53. Have a moment of silence during your holiday prayer or toast in memory of your loved one.
54. Donate a holiday meal to a family in need through a local church, salvation army, or department of social services.
55. Identify the people who will be able to help and support you during the holidays and identify who may cause you more stress. Try to spend more time with the former group and less with the latter.
56. Make some quiet time for yourself. The holidays can be hectic, so make quiet time for yourself to journal, meditate, listen to music, etc.
57. Practice self-care. I know, how cliché. But it's true: Whatever it is that helps you recharge, do it. You can find some self-care tips here.
58. Support kids by doing a memorial grief activity together.
59. Donate altar flowers or other holiday decorations at your place of worship in memory of your loved one.
60. Prioritize and don't overcommit. When the holidays are filled with so many parties, dinners, and events, save your energy for those that are most important. Look at everything you have to do and rank them in order of importance. Plan for the most important and skip the rest.
61. Make a list and check it twice. Grief makes it harder for us to concentrate and remember things. When you have a lot going on at the holidays, make a list even if you aren't usually a list-maker, and write things on the calendar.
62. Skip the holidays. Really. If you just can't face the holiday, it's okay to take a break this year. Before you get to this extreme, consider if you could just simplify your holiday. If you do skip, still make a plan. Decide if you will still see friends or family, go see a new movie, or make another plan.
63. Enjoy yourself! The holidays will be tough, but there will also be love and joy.
64. Remember, it is okay to be happy. This doesn't diminish how much you love and miss the person who isn't there this holiday. Don't feel guilty for the joy you do find this holiday season.

Surrey Hospice Society (604) 584-7006

