

Grief and Holidays

How to Deal with Grief During the Holidays

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201512/how-deal-grief-during-the-holidays>

Posted Dec 21, 2015

The holidays can be the toughest time of the year.

Christmas music, holiday parties, and festive decorations that were meant to bring joy served as painful reminders of my loss.

As it is for most people experiencing loss, the holiday season was the most painful time of all. Strategies to help you cope with the holidays:

1. Trust That Grief Is Part of Healing

Time doesn't heal the pain associated with a loss; it's what you do with that time that matters.

Grief is the process by which you heal.

Experiencing the pain - rather than constantly trying to escape it - can actually help you feel better in the long-term.

So, while it may be tempting to pretend the holidays don't exist—or to numb the pain with alcohol - temporarily avoiding the pain only prolongs the anguish.

Eventually, the holidays will get easier, but only if you allow yourself to experience the grief of going through them without your loved one.

2. Set Healthy Boundaries

You certainly don't have to force yourself to face every holiday event or celebratory tradition, however.

If attending a tree lighting ceremony or participating in the office gift swap is likely to bring about too many painful memories this year, be willing to say no.

Other people may try to convince you to participate, but you certainly don't have to try to please everyone.

3. *Focus on What You Can Control*

There are a lot of things you can't control about the holidays.

You may be subjected to Christmas music in the waiting room of your doctor's office or you may overhear your co-workers constantly talking about their holiday plans.

While you can't prevent those things from happening, there are some things you can control.

Think about what you can do to lessen the heartache when you can.

It's OK to limit your decorations or shop for presents online only.

Pick a few things you can do to assert some control over the holiday cheer, and keep in mind that life goes on for other people and it's OK that they're happy to celebrate this year.

4. *Plan Ahead*

Often, the anticipation over how hard something is going to be is worse than the actual event.

So, while Thanksgiving dinner may only last two hours, you could easily spend three weeks dreading it.

Create a simple plan for how you'll get through the holidays to avoid extending your anguish.

Often, it's helpful to create an escape plan.

Drive yourself to holiday functions or ride with a trusted friend who will take you home whenever you want.

Just knowing you can easily leave at any time can help you enjoy the activity much more than you would if you felt stuck.

5. *Allow Yourself to Feel a Range of Emotions*

The holidays can bring about a wide range of emotions.

You might feel joy, guilt, and sadness all within a few minutes.

Allow yourself to feel those emotions without judging yourself or thinking you should be happy, or you shouldn't be laughing.

6. *Find a Way to Honor Your Memories*

Create a special way to memorialize the person you've lost.

Whether you decide to light a candle every night or eat your loved one's favorite food, honoring your loved one can serve as a tangible reminder that although your loved one is gone, the love never dies.

7. *Create New Traditions*

Don't be afraid to create new traditions this year too.

It's OK to get creative and do something a little out of the ordinary.

You can also alter old traditions and make them fit better with the new phase in your life.

8. *Do Something Kind for Others*

Even when you're in the midst of grief, you still have something to offer the world.

Performing a few acts of kindness can be really good for a grieving person's spirit.

Donate gifts to families in need, serve meals at a soup kitchen, or volunteer to help people at a nursing home make holiday craft if you're up for it.

9. *Ask for Help*

Don't be afraid to ask for help when you're struggling with the holidays.

Reminding loved ones that you're having a rough time may be enough, but you also may want to reach out for more support.

Look for support groups or contact a professional counselor to help you deal with your grief in a healthy manner.

Amy Morin, LCSW

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/experts/amy-morin>