

# Tips for Managing Grief During the Holidays



December is the feel-good season, and there's love and laughter everywhere. It's when families plan holiday vacations; people buy gifts, friends and colleagues go partying, and festive decorations are found around every corner. Yet, there are those among us who dread being amid all this.

For many, the festive season is a painful reminder of their grief from losing a loved one recently. Losing a loved one can be a profound experience at any time of the year. But the holidays can renew feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, emptiness, and even anger or resentment. The pain may surface as physiological symptoms, such as loss of appetite or insomnia. Even when participating in the festivities, a grieving person can feel guilt for attempting to overcome the memories.

If you want the upcoming holiday season to feel different, here are a few things you can do to help alleviate some pain of grief and inner conflict.

## Lean into the Uncomfortable Emotions

Your attempts to avoid emotional distress may amplify anguish during the holiday season. Trying to dodge the discomfort you feel around the holidays will keep you in a downward spiral of pain and misery. Instead, acknowledge your feelings of isolation, hurt, and despair. Allow the grief to coexist with your desire to bounce back to life and enjoy the holiday season.

## Set Boundaries

Festive events and gatherings can trigger memories of the times spent with your loved one and make it harder to

bear their absence. One way to deal with the grief is to restrict the number of holiday celebrations you attend this year. Let your friends and family know your decision on how much (or how little) you want to be involved in the gatherings and celebrations.

## Is It Time to Create New Holiday Traditions?

It's only natural to want to honor the memory of your loved one by continuing with the holiday traditions you had together. Could your efforts to recreate the memories be triggering your grief? Only you can make this very personal assessment. But maybe it's time to keep some time-honored traditions and create new ones that may inspire you.

## Be Aware of Alcohol Consumption

The holiday season celebrations are almost always accompanied by increased consumption of alcohol. You may be using alcohol to appear more cheerful than you really feel. Check in with yourself to see what's driving the decision to drink. If it's caused by the desire to escape personal grief, say no to the glass. But is a substance use disorder (SUD) part of your drinking history? Stress can make this illness worse. Consider contacting your company EAP or a medical practitioner who specializes in substance use disorders and ask for assessment and recommendations for treatment.

## Give Back, Reach Out, Offer Others Personal Support

Helping others may alleviate your pain and give you a sense of purpose at an overwhelming time. You could cook a meal for a friend who does not have local family or who is without needed resources. You could visit a nursing home holiday event, serve a meal at a soup kitchen, or donate gifts at an orphanage. Grieving persons have consistently reported that engaging with others in these ways offers relief.

## Contact the EAP

Grief is reduced when you share it, and if you don't have the support to do that, seek help. Reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for help and support, or to share what's on your mind. You'll discover confidentiality, empathy, and very likely workable solutions to issues you are struggling with right now.

Ask the EAP about local community centers and religious organizations that may offer grief support groups. There are online support groups, too. Talking with a therapist can provide a safe, non-judgmental space to process your grief.

Making a concerted effort to recognize, process, and tackle the emotional triggers during the holiday season will help you combat personal grief. And remember, it's likely your loved one would want you to enjoy the holidays.