



## **FaithWorks Counseling**

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## **A Guide to Coping With Grief During the Holidays**

### ***Supporting Yourself Through a Season That Feels Different***

The holiday season can amplify the pain of loss. Traditions, family gatherings, and memories may bring waves of sadness, longing, or emotional overwhelm. This guide is designed to help you navigate the holidays with gentleness, intention, and support.

#### **1. Acknowledge Your Feelings**

Grief often intensifies during special times of the year.

It is okay to feel:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Confusion
- Even moments of joy

All emotions are valid. Give yourself permission to feel whatever comes up without judging your experience.

#### **2. Plan Ahead**

Holidays can feel more manageable when you prepare for them.

Ask yourself:

- *“Which events feel okay to attend?”*
- *“Which traditions feel painful or overwhelming?”*
- *“Where can I give myself room to say no?”*

Create a flexible plan. It’s okay to change your mind the day of. It’s also okay to leave early, take breaks, or opt out entirely.

### 3. Modify Traditions

You don't have to celebrate the same way you did before the loss.

Options include:

- Keeping certain traditions exactly as they were
- Changing or simplifying traditions
- Creating a new tradition to honor your loved one

Examples:

- Light a candle in their memory
- Set out a special ornament
- Share a favorite story about them
- Cook their favorite dish

Choose what feels right *for this year*—your needs may shift next year.

### 4. Honor Your Loved One

Finding ways to include their memory can bring comfort.

Consider:

- Writing a letter to them
- Looking through photos when you feel ready
- Making a donation in their name
- Creating a “memory box” or keepsake ornament
- Saying a prayer or blessing in their honor

Small rituals can bring meaning and connection during a difficult time.

### 5. Protect Your Emotional and Physical Energy

Grief is exhausting. Holidays can be too.

Allow yourself:

- Rest
- Simple meals
- Time alone when needed
- Reduced responsibilities
- Saying “no” without guilt

Your energy level may fluctuate—listen to your body.

## **6. Set Boundaries With Others**

You are not obligated to explain your decisions to everyone.

You may say:

- “I appreciate the invitation, but I’m not up for that this year.”
- “I may need to step away for a bit during the gathering.”
- “Thank you for understanding that I’m taking things slowly.”

Healthy boundaries help protect your emotional well-being.

## **7. Allow Joy Without Guilt**

Grief and joy can coexist.

Laughing, smiling, or enjoying a moment does *not* mean you miss your loved one any less. These moments can offer needed relief and do not diminish your grief or love.

## **8. Lean on Support**

Choose supportive people who understand you may be fragile this season.

Support may include:

- Friends or family who listen without judgment
- Support groups
- Spiritual communities
- Your therapist
- Grief hotlines or online groups

You don’t have to face this season alone.

## **9. Take Care of Your Body**

Grief impacts the body as much as the mind.

Aim for:

- Regular meals
- Hydration
- Gentle movement
- Sleep
- Fresh air

Even small efforts make a meaningful difference.

## **10. Be Patient and Compassionate With Yourself**

There is no “right” way to grieve during the holidays.

Remember:

- Grief is not linear
- You may have good days and hard days
- You may feel differently from one moment to the next
- Your grief is a sign of love
- Healing takes time

Show yourself the same kindness you would offer someone else in pain.

## **11. Have a Backup Plan**

If you attend an event or gathering, plan a safe exit strategy.

Ask yourself:

- “How will I know when I need a break?”
- “Who can I signal or call if I feel overwhelmed?”
- “Where can I go to breathe or reset?”

Having a plan can reduce anxiety and help you feel more in control.

## **12. Reach Out If You’re Feeling Overwhelmed**

If grief becomes too heavy:

- Contact a trusted friend or family member
- Reach out to your therapist
- Call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) if needed
- Use local crisis resources

You deserve support, comfort, and safety.

## **Closing Message**

Grieving during the holidays is deeply personal. There is no “right” way to do this—only the way that honors your heart, your needs, and your loved one.

Take the season moment by moment.

Give yourself grace.

And remember: you are not alone in this journey.

*“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.”*

Psalm 55:22