Ways to Remember and Celebrate My Loved One Who Died

Holidays, birthdays, and other anniversaries are likely to trigger upsurges in grief. Many grieving people feel that the anticipation of special dates and events can be more difficult than coping with the day itself. Talking with others (including children, family members, friends, support groups, and counselors) and creating healing rituals can assist in coping. Remember to be gentle with yourself and do what feels most comfortable for you at this time. Don’t feel pressured to set unrealistic expectations and remember to balance activity with rest. Think of the options below as a partial menu to select from. Each family member may have unique styles of coping, and one of the keys to adjusting to a “new normal” in grief is gentle communication and trying out different self-care strategies. Praise yourself and other family members for small gains during these difficult days.

- Plan a favorite meal or dessert or go to my loved one’s favorite restaurant
- Plant a tree or create a memorial garden (Winter can be a great time of year to look through seed catalogs and plan for spring planting)
- Look at photos or video of the loved one who died
- Make a quilt, pillow, or bear out of my loved one’s clothes
- Give a memorial gift in honor of my loved one
- Read a book of meditations, prayers, or grief support
- Bring balloons, ice candles, flowers, to the cemetery or other memorial site
- Hang a special ornament or wreath
- Light a candle and say a prayer
- Create a web site in honor of my loved one who died
- Send a memorial message/photo to the newspaper
- Volunteer my time or talents in my loved one’s honor
- Do something my loved one enjoyed (or I enjoy) in their honor (movie, bowling, massage, hiking)
- Take photos of what gives me hope and strength in the midst of my grief
More Ideas For Children, Teens, and Families:

- Draw pictures of happy memories
- Put I love you messages, notes of special memories, or drawings from family members in my loved ones Christmas stocking or a special memory box
- Write a poem or story
- Make up a song about the person who died
- Play a game, read a book, or watch a funny movie my loved one enjoyed
- Talk into a tape recorder and tell special memories
- Make a music CD of my loved ones favorite music or listen to music I find comforting
- Tell a special friend about my loved one who died
- Ask my family for something that belonged to my loved one and/or a photo to keep for myself
- Make a memory book
- Go on a memory photo outing. Photograph your loved ones favorite places and put them in an album. Add captions to the photos of special memories
Hope for the Holidays for those who are grieving

Holidays, typically a time of celebration, can be very stressful for anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one during the year. Many bereaved persons talk in terms of trying to “survive” the holidays.

Here are some suggestions for reducing your stress and promoting realistic self-care:

- Do what makes you comfortable, not what others think will make you comfortable. Avoid unrealistic expectations for you to be joyful. Your life has changed; the holidays will be different. It is not a choice of pain or no pain, but how to manage the pain.
- Begin with a conversation with family or friends to discuss what old traditions you would like to carry on and what new traditions you may choose to try this year. Include the children in your planning; they may have unique needs and ideas that need to be shared.
- If you decide to have a tree, you might want different decorations, or perhaps put the tree in a different location. If you hang stockings, do you want to hang one in memory of your loved one, or is that too painful?
- Holiday menus might be changed, seating at the table altered. Maybe this is the year for the survivors to volunteer time at a church or charity dining room, or visit with shut-ins.
- Spread the workload among your family. Fatigue can lead to depression under normal circumstances, so try not to tax your limited emotional and physical resources. Try to get adequate rest.
- Some grievers find that focusing on their spiritual beliefs adds a sense of meaning and comfort to their holiday season.
- Taking time for yourself. Recognize that the holidays are stressful and will include sorrowful as well as joyful moments.
- By all means, do not set unrealistic goals for yourself. The world will not end if you do not attend every holiday function this year.
- Remember that it is not time that heals but what we do with that time.
- Seek support from others who understand and can serve as compassionate listeners. That may be a family member, friend, grief support group, therapist or grief support volunteer.
- Love does not end with death. Recall the memories; they are a very important part of you. You might light a special candle for the person who has died privately or in the company of family or friends.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Would the day be special without it?</th>
<th>Would you like to do it differently this year?</th>
<th>Is it done from duty, habit or choice?</th>
<th>Do you like doing this activity?</th>
<th>Would you like to do it again this year?</th>
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<td>Make list of chores</td>
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<td>Have extra clean home</td>
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<td>Decorate home inside &amp; outside</td>
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<td>Holiday shopping</td>
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<td>Prepare traditional meals</td>
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<td>Make holiday gifts</td>
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<td>Give presents to family</td>
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<td>Exchange gifts with friends</td>
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<td>Attend social functions</td>
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<td>Send holiday cards</td>
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<td>Attend special church/temple services &amp; activities</td>
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<td>Spend sharing time with family</td>
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<td>Attend special program with children</td>
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<td>Do usual holiday activities with children</td>
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Adapted from Grief and the Holidays and Something More for the Holidays A.A.R.P

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What Do We Need During Grief?

Permission to Grieve—There is no healthy way to avoid the pain of grief. The capacity to endure is necessary for recovery.

Time Alone—Solitude is where we learn anew who we are. It is when we become quiet that we can hear our own deepest thoughts. Solitude must be balanced with time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. It may take months and years of time to feel and understand all the feeling that go along with your loss.

Rest, Relaxation, Exercise, Nourishment and Diversion—You may need extra amounts of the things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a “cause” to work for that helps others—any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an exhausting process emotionally. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people and things you love.

Security—Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. You may need to allow yourself to do things at your own pace.

Hope—You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing some things that helped them, realizing that they have recovered and that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

Caring—Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

Small Pleasures—Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures as you are ready. Enjoy sunsets.

Goals—For awhile, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to; playing tennis with friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, a trip next month, helps you get through the time in an immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don’t be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn’t the same. This is normal. As time passes you may need to work on some longer-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life. You need guidance or counseling to help with this.

Understanding—Understand that grief often takes two steps forward and one backward. Sometimes after a long period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair or anger. Just when we think we’re on solid ground, a fresh wave of grief threatens to overwhelm us. Accept this as part of the nature of grief.