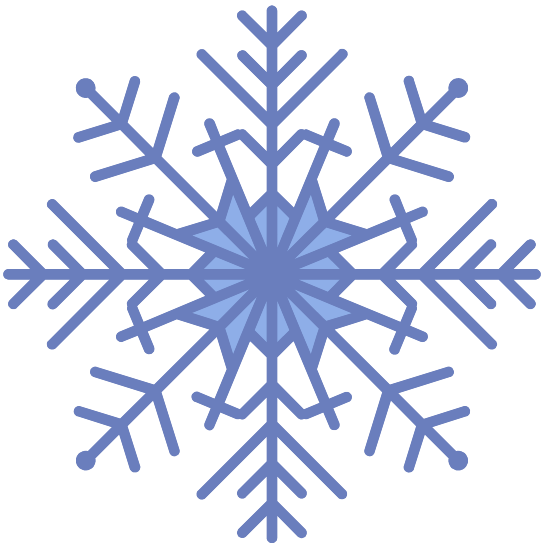


COPING WITH GRIEF THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

ADULT WORKBOOK

How to prepare for the holiday season while coping with grief.

PRESENTED BY CALM WATERS CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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Coping with Grief through the Holidays

10 tips to ease the burden of loss this season

1. Plan Ahead
2. Set Boundaries: there are no “shoulds” & “should nots”
3. Accept limitations
4. Be prepared
5. Ask for help (even when its hard)
6. Cope with feelings as they arise
7. Engage in self-care
8. Find ways to remember & honor your loved one
9. Celebrate change & create new traditions
10. Give yourself permission to feel joy

This workbook offers more details on each tip and practical ways to use them. The following activities will guide you in reflecting and intentionally applying these tips as you navigate the holiday season while grieving.



Coping with Grief through the Holidays

The pressure, reminders, and events around the holidays are hard to navigate while on your grief journey. All the feelings and experiences you have on your grief journey are okay. Here are some tips to consider that may help as you navigate the challenges which can come with the holiday season:

Plan ahead.
Anxiety and anticipation leading up to the season can be more intense than the actual holidays. Planning ahead can help lower anxiety and stress for both adults and children. If you have children, involve them in discussions about what they would like to do. *This will give them a sense of control* during this emotional time. Once you've decided what you can and can't do, share your decisions with friends and family. We will also be making a plan today.

Other people do not have the power to determine what you should (or shouldn't) do.
You don't have to do what others think you should do. Give yourself the right to do what you want to do and it's okay to ask for what you need. What are things that you would like to do this holiday season?

Accept limitations.
You may not be able to do all the things you've always done. Which aspects of the holidays are especially challenging for your family? Consider scaling back or changing things you may have done in the past, and consider what has been or might be especially enjoyable or meaningful to your family. Which aspects of the holidays are things that you know will be done the same?

Be informed before attending events.

Find out who will be there, how long it's expected to last, and whether you need to do anything to prepare for it. As a family, brainstorm ways you and your children want to respond to questions or offers of help from others. What boundaries will you be setting with your loved ones?

Ask for help, even when it's hard to do.

If it feels right, allow people to help in concrete ways such as cleaning, cooking, baking, shopping, childcare, and running errands. Sometimes we worry about burdening others, but more often than not, they are eager to help. What are some ways that you could ask for help?

Cope with feelings as they arise.

It's natural for children, as well as adults, to experience a wide range of emotions while grieving. As hard as this time may be, it's important to express and cope with feelings as they arise. Avoid minimizing your own and your child's feelings or trying to put a "positive" spin on their expressions.

For example, saying "It's important to focus on the good times you had with your dad," is likely to communicate that you don't want your child to hear about painful things. Instead, validate and reflect the emotion by saying, for example, "It makes sense that you really miss your dad right now and wish he were here." Finding ways to positively cope with these emotions is important as well. Be sure you and your children have identified positive coping skills to use when difficult feelings arise. What are some healthy ways that you cope?

Engage in self-care.

The holidays can be physically and emotionally draining, especially if you're grieving. Encourage rest and quiet play at times, and plan for healthy eating and hydration for the entire family. Always remember to take care of yourself. Give yourself a break, surround yourself with a strong support system, and take time to recharge. What are your ideas for self-care?

Find ways to remember and honor the person who died.

Include memories of the person who died in your celebration. Encourage children to make something meaningful specifically for this person. Decide as a family where these items should be placed during the holidays.
Here are some ideas to consider:

- Light a memorial candle. Invite children and other friends/family to share memories.
- Write a card or letter to the person who died.
- Write memories on strips of paper and use them to create a paper chain.
- Hang a special decoration in memory of the person, such as a wreath or stocking. If a stocking is used, family members can place cards or pieces of paper with memories inside.
- Buy a gift the person would have liked and donate it to a charity.
- Gift-wrap a box and make an opening in the top for family and friends to share written memories. At a special time the box can be unwrapped and the memories shared.
- Set a special memorial place at the table during a holiday meal.
- Create a memorabilia table or corner where you can place photos, stuffed animals, toys, cards, foods, and any other kinds of mementos.
- Share one of the person's favorite foods or meals. Food can be a great spark for sharing memories.

Celebrate change and create new traditions.

The holiday season is steeped in sentiment and tradition, which is why people who are in transition sometimes choose to ignore the holidays altogether. Many difficult reminders may arise that can cause difficulties engaging in usual traditions. Suppress the urge to ignore the holidays because they may seem too painful to endure. Decide what works for you and what doesn't – and edit accordingly.

It's important that children are given the opportunity to celebrate the holidays without feeling bad or feeling guilty. Involve your children in discussions about what they would like to do. You and your family may decide to keep everything the same or change everything – or you may fall somewhere in-between. Establish traditions with your children, even new ones that may be off time or different from past rituals. Your kids may not remember the details of 2004, but year-in, year-out traditions will stay with them for a lifetime.

Give yourself permission to feel joy.

Navigating the holiday season after losing a loved one can make it challenging to embrace joy and join in festivities. Remember, every emotion you feel is normal, valid, and deserves space. It's okay to allow yourself moments of happiness, even amid the heaviness of grief.

Family Plan for the Holidays

After creating your lists for each item, go back through and identify who will be responsible for tasks you wish to keep/create, and who can help.

Food

What foods do we typically cook for the holidays? What are the favorite foods of the person who died? Who can help this year? Do we want to cook at home or go out? What will we bring to parties?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

Activity:

On this page, draw a picture of these old and new food traditions. Where is this at? What will the table look like? Who will be there? Who will sit where?

Events, parties, and family gatherings

Do we want to attend our usual parties this year? Will we host a gathering? Do we want to include the memory of the person who died? How? How will we handle conversations about the person who died? What about conversations with people who do not know about our grief story?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

Decorations

Do we want to decorate this year? What were the favorite decorations of the person who died? Do we want to create decorations to honor the person who we are grieving?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

Activity:

On this page, draw a picture of these old and new decoration traditions. Consider making a wreath with element that remind you of your loved one. Where could it hang?

Traditions

What traditions are connected to the person who died? What new traditions would we like to create? (Explore this without worrying what others will think!) How will we carve out time for ourselves and our reactions? Who can we go to for support and care?

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

Activity: Have each member in your family answer a question on the provided memory sticks.

Post-Holidays

What have you traditionally done for New Year's Eve and Day? What do you normally do during January and February? What did the person who died enjoy doing? You may want to plan a trip or some other special event for after the holidays end. January and February can be daunting months even during the best of circumstances, so it can be helpful to have something to look forward to that isn't connected to the holiday season.

List what you normally do and star the items you want to keep.

List new traditions you want to start.

Activity: Plan a family outing for an upcoming holiday for less than $50.

Reflection

Just as you set aside time to have a family meeting to create a plan for the holiday season, it's equally important to meet and talk about how things went for each of you. Let family members know ahead of time that there will be a chance to discuss what worked, what didn't, what you want to do differently next year, and to check in about how people are doing after the holidays. It can be important to let others know what they did that was especially helpful or caring.

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