

## Grief and Special Occasions

Are you facing a difficult time this holiday season? Maybe you know someone who is? Maybe it's an anniversary or a birthday? Sometimes you may notice an unexpected increase in your feelings of unhappiness as a significant dates approach, or perhaps you hear music or smell something or see something that triggers a memory of your loved one. It is quite normal to feel sensitive to your grief when you are reminded of your loss and even

sometimes to find yourself experiencing an increase in your feelings of grief and not quite understand the cause until you realise later that a significant date is approaching or has passed. (I worked with a lady who had been married 65 years and her husband passed away on New Year's Eve. Every December she got a little anxious and depressed and wasn't sure why until she remembered that this was *the* month!). You're allowed to grieve. You're allowed to laugh and be happy without feeling guilty – it is not a betrayal and does not mean you have forgotten or don't miss them. God is always there for us for strength and comfort (2 Cor 1) in times of weeping or laughter, mourning or dancing (Ecc 3:4-5). We are allowed to grieve, and we will each do it in our own unique way in our own time.



Think about how you would like to spend the special occasions: you might like to spend the day with family or friends, plan an activity, or have time to yourself – whatever works for you. Sometimes it may be better to be surrounded by those who truly care for you. You may find it useful to think about the days that are difficult

and plan ahead especially if it's supposed to be a happy time that many people spend with family, or if it's the first birthday or anniversary or Christmas without your loved one. It's not easy to smile and pretend that everything is good when inside your heart is breaking, and normally-fun family traditions are painful reminders of your loss. There are no right or wrong answers to what you should or should not do on these occasions. You may want to continue with the traditions, or you may want to change them if you feel they are too painful. What you decide for this year can be changed next year. You can try something new or stay with the old way, always remembering that difficult feelings come and go, and they can be mixed with happy feelings and memories as well.

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Your grief for a lost loved one will always be with you, but it usually does change and become less intense as time goes by.

Here are a few ideas that may help you:

**1 Write about it.** Write a tribute to the one you've lost. Writing a personal tribute in your favourite journal can help you clarify what you are feeling and thinking. Why not share this tribute with family members, along with a framed photo of your loved one?



**2 Give thanks.** Thank God for His many blessings in your life. Focus on having a heart of gratefulness by making a list of things you are thankful for and remind yourself of those thoughts throughout the day. If you have time, you could even sit down and write out some cards to loved ones expressing your gratefulness for them in your life.

**3 Find the funny.** There is a time to laugh (Ecc 3:4) and even in laughter the heart may ache (Prov 14:13)

**4 Reach out.** Reach out to your family and friends - even if only for a brief coffee date.



**5 Plan** what you want to do and not want to do during this time.

**6** Do something to **honour your loved one.**

**7 Recognise that** the absence of your loved one will cause pain no matter what you do. This is often a time filled with bittersweet memories. You may find yourself reminiscing and sharing the memories with your family and friends can be helpful.

**8** Give yourself permission to **have fun and experience joy** when you can, just as you give yourself permission to mourn when you need to.

**9 Tell people** what you find helpful. Sometimes concerned family or friends are unsure about how to help. Encourage them to let you grieve in your own way and in your own time.

**10 Rest.** Take it slow and easy. Be kind to yourself. Rest if you feel tired. Don't overwhelm or over commit yourself.