

# *Grief: Self-Help for the Holidays*

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The holiday time is difficult for many people. The absence of loved ones is magnified as memories of past celebrations and other significant life events raise feelings of loss.

I invite you to consider these suggestions, which may help make this time of year a little easier.

- ♦ Take good care of yourself. Ask yourself what you need at this time.
  - ♦ Allow yourself to grieve in a way that feels right for you.
  - ♦ Recognize that you may experience heightened emotions when interacting with loved ones and others. You may feel more fragile and vulnerable than usual.
  - ♦ Know that your feelings may change with little or no notice. You may experience a whirlwind of emotions and thoughts: anger, sadness and frustration. You may feel a deep longing for the person who has died and increased sense of loneliness. You may catch yourself laughing and experiencing the joy of the moment or day, followed by guilt for having such an experience. This too is normal. Remember that all of your feelings are okay—emotions generally co-exist rather than operate in an either-or way. As you continue to adjust to life without your loved one you will experience more joy than sorrow.
  - ♦ Give yourself permission to change the way you do the holidays this year. If thoughts of the family traditions are too distressing prepare and celebrate in a way that feels more comfortable for you.
  - ♦ Create alternate or new traditions to complement or replace those you find too difficult to engage in. For instance, making subtle changes in holiday decorating, activities and meals may help to ease the process of adjusting to the new reality.
  - ♦ Ask others for help when you need it. For instance, if you decide to decorate and prepare your family's traditional meals invite close friends or family members to do it with or for you.
  - ♦ Shop early or online if you want to buy gifts but find the crowds and holiday shopping hype too challenging.
- ♦ Give yourself permission not to celebrate this year. You may find it is too painful to engage in any holiday events. Invite the people you feel most comfortable with to spend some non-holiday focused time with you.
  - ♦ Honour and remember your loved one in a special way. You may find some comfort by engaging in simple activities that acknowledge your, loved one and your loss. Some examples: a decoration, scrapbook or memory box with family trinkets and photos; a donation made in the person's name; plant a tree; hang a stocking; light a candle; create a memorial space in your home.
  - ♦ Reach out and ask for help. It can be helpful to share your concerns, feelings and apprehensions with someone you feel comfortable with. Over the years many have told me they find it difficult to reach out to others—concerned they may burden them, or feeling foolish. It is possible that those people may be waiting for you to ask. If it feels okay allow yourself to check it out and ask that person close to you if they would mind supporting you at this time.

If you are overwhelmed with distress or wanting support from someone other than a family member or friend I invite you to contact me. For many years I have provided support to individuals and families over the holiday time. Please feel welcome to contact me for counselling support.

*"No one's death comes to pass  
without making some impression.  
And those close to the deceased  
Inherit part of the liberated soul and  
Become richer in their humanness."*

*Herman Broch*