

Grief Notes

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Grief Through the Holidays by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

Holidays can be a challenging time for people who are grieving. Many of the activities, traditions, and messages associated with the day, such as love, comfort, gratitude, and family togetherness, can feel in direct conflict with a grieving person's particular reality. If grieving, you probably know or anticipate that experiencing grief during the holidays is likely to be difficult, even painful. Though you may put on a good front for family and friends, holiday events and gatherings can often cause a deeper sense of grief and loneliness.



After a death, it is common for grieving people to feel apathy toward experiences that previously brought them joy and happiness. This is not a choice one makes; grief profoundly changes the way life looks and

feels at these special times. You'd love to feel the familiar and enthusiastic holiday feelings, but instead, it is as if you are standing outside in the cold, watching through a window while everyone else enjoys the warmth of the holiday season together.

As the holidays approach, many people experience heavy thoughts and frustrating emotions of grief that may lead them to consider just skipping the holidays all together. During these times, there are so many things that can trigger

our grief to the point that we are far from feeling joyful or grateful. But it doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to choose between grief or feeling grateful. It's common through the grieving process to have conflicting emotions. Try to have a balanced outlook towards gratitude this holiday season. Look for ways to celebrate with those you love, who are also working hard to navigate this journey and the emotions that go with it.

Be kind and patient with yourself. It is important to allow yourself to experience various emotions without judgment. These emotions will come and go as you navigate through the grieving process but are often magnified during these special times. Take the time you need to process being with family and friends and then do so when you feel ready. Openly and honestly share with others how you are feeling so you are not pressured to participate in everything.

Perhaps helping others can be a way to stay connected while also bringing new meaning to the holiday season. Try connecting with those who are also experiencing grief and loss or contribute to an organization that helps others. Don't feel guilty for briefly setting aside your feelings of grief. Grieving has periods of highs and lows.

Make these special days your own. It is okay to experience the holiday in whatever manner you feel best. You might celebrate with traditions, not celebrate at all, or create new traditions and memories. Remember, while holiday movies and greeting cards render images of blissfulness, the reality is that the holidays are difficult for many. You are not alone and can create your own holiday experience as you continue your journey toward healing and wholeness.