

Grief Relief During The Holidays

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Can you feel it? Holiday stress creeping in as Halloween makes its annual appearance, taking over department stores and malls only to be replaced soon after by holiday lights and music.

Stress is a reality for all of us. According to the [American Psychological Association's Stress in America Report](#), significantly greater percentages of adults report experiencing extreme stress levels. The survey found that money and work are the top two sources of stress followed by family responsibilities, personal health concerns, and health problems affecting the family. For people with mental illness—which affects nearly 20 percent of U.S. adults according to the [National Institute of Mental](#)

Health, the stress of the holidays can further exacerbate their ability to cope with their illness.

Holidays compound stress as we overload ourselves, drain our bank accounts, and manage family expectations. We see this frequently at PRS, a nonprofit serving those with mental illness and facing life crises. During the holidays, our crisis hotline and textline receive many calls about increased anxiety and overwhelming life stress.

Holiday Coping Tips after a Loss

In addition, holidays are especially difficult after the loss of a loved one. The traditions and rituals we may have shared with someone become painful as we cope with their absence. Our experts suggest these tips in dealing with loss during the holidays:

- Give yourself time to acknowledge that holidays are full of rituals you may have shared with your loved one. Determine what feels better: to continue with the structure of how things used to be or to make it different this year.
- Pay close attention to your energy levels. Grieving is really hard physically and emotionally and self-care is extremely important.
- Give yourself permission and be prepared to expect less of yourself – it may not be possible to do all of the things you have done in the past. Be sure to ask for help or modify your plans if your energy level is not there.
- Talk with family and friends about how you will remember your loved one.
- Can you and are you willing to try new traditions, or special rituals to include the memories you have in the celebration? It may be important to you to save space to remember his/her life.

Signs to Seek Help

Though some people may experience “holiday blues” that pass with the season, others will have profound feelings of sadness or depression that do not go away over time.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Sleeping too much or too little, middle-of-the night or early morning waking
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Irritability or restlessness
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Feeling inappropriate guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness

If depression or mental illness make the holidays unbearable, then finding help is important. Talk to your family physician or a psychiatrist. Another option is calling a hotline such as [The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#).

No matter what, the holidays will come...and go. Allowing yourself to grieve, setting realistic goals for the holidays, and taking time each day to care for and celebrate yourself are important ways to de-stress the holidays.

If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#). Outside of the U.S., please visit the [International Association for Suicide Prevention](#) for a database of resources.