



Balance In Grief B.I.G. Tip Sheet



Grief Coach
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Holiday Grief: Navigating Peace During the Holidays. Finding Peace Amid the Pain.

It doesn't seem to matter where you go during the holiday months—stores, window displays, even a simple drive down the street—there are constant reminders that the holidays are approaching. For those grieving, these reminders can become unexpected triggers of emotion. Memories of past traditions shared with your loved one can flood your mind without warning, stirring feelings of grief and loss. While the holidays are joyful for many, they can be among the most painful and challenging days for those mourning. Holiday grief can feel like a journey within a journey—one that demands tenderness, patience, and care.

Our society's expectations rarely take grief into account. Of course, it is understandable that people want to enjoy celebrations, gatherings, and traditions. These rituals can be beautiful and meaningful, and they shouldn't be dismissed simply because many are hurting this time of year. However, communities and loved ones sometimes overlook the needs of those who are grieving, unintentionally placing expectations on them without understanding the emotional weight they carry.

This is why it is essential—especially during this season—to offer yourself intentional self-care. You have full permission to set boundaries without guilt. You can say, "Thank you for the invitation, but I'm going to decline. I hope you have a wonderful time," or, "I'd love to join, but I can only stay for a short while," or even, "I can't participate in all my usual traditions this year. Thank you for understanding." These responses are not only acceptable—they are healthy acts of self-compassion.

Some people around you may believe that pushing you into holiday plans will help you "take your mind off things," "stop feeling sad," or—worse—"get over it." Their intentions may be kind, but the impact can feel deeply invalidating. It would be wonderful if everyone grieving had a community that stepped in gently and tended to their needs without being asked. If you do have that support, it is a gift. But if you don't, it becomes even more important to care for your own heart and honor your own limits. I hope this guidance offers a bit of support as you navigate this season.

In my experience, making a plan for the holiday—no matter how simple—can be helpful. If you choose to join others, consider including a moment of remembrance or asking someone you trust to be a supportive presence should you become overwhelmed. Allow yourself to hope for moments of joy while also giving yourself permission to feel whatever emotions arise. Planning doesn't erase grief, but it can give you a sense of steadiness, helping you move gently through the waves of emotion that may come. As you honor what has been lost, also hold space for what remains—love, memory, and connection that continue to live within you.

Avoiding the holidays altogether will not make the grief disappear. More often, it can intensify feelings of sorrow, loneliness, or hopelessness. Even if you choose to stay home or keep your plans simple, I encourage you to intentionally set aside time to be with your emotions, to remember your loved one in ways that feel comforting or meaningful, and to create space for gentle connection.

Holiday grief is undeniably difficult, but it can also serve as a tender reminder of the love you shared and the joy your loved one brought into your life. In whatever ways feel right—big or small—honor that continuing bond. Celebrate the love that remains, and look for ways to offer some of that love back to yourself and to others.

May you feel the deep love that only grief can teach. It is an everlasting expression that continues even after your loved one has transitioned from this physical world. May your holidays be filled with unexpected moments of joy, peace, and loving-kindness, and may you feel the warmth of your loved one filling your heart and mind.

1. Understanding Holiday Grief

What it is: The holidays can magnify loss. Traditions, gatherings, and festive expectations often highlight the absence of someone we love, stirring sadness, loneliness, and even guilt for not feeling “merry.”

Why it matters: Grief Coach Kat Farace notes that emotional dissonance—feeling joy and sorrow side by side—is completely normal. Grief doesn’t take a holiday day off, and neither should your self-compassion and care.

2. Quick Grounding Techniques

Name what you feel: Say to yourself, *“This ache is grief showing up for the person I miss.”* Naming it brings clarity and calm.

Breathing space: Try a slow inhale for 4 counts, hold for 2, exhale for 6. This can calm the nervous system when emotions surge.

Micro-moments of rest: Step outside for a breath of fresh air, light a candle, or sit quietly with tea—small pauses can restore balance amid chaos. Close your eyes for just a moment, and seek to release any tension you feel in your body.

Boundaries are gifts: It’s okay to say no to events or traditions that feel too painful this year. Protecting your energy is an act of love, not selfishness. It doesn’t matter if you are in your 1st, or even 2nd year of grief. Find ways to acknowledge the holiday that honor your feelings and your loved one.

3. Processing through Reflection

Honor what’s changed: Ask yourself, “What traditions feel comforting to keep? Which ones might I pause or reimagine?”

Write it out: Journal about what feels hardest this season, or write a letter to your loved one sharing what you miss and what memories warm your heart.

Gentle reframing: Shift from *“I can’t enjoy the holidays anymore”* to *“I can create small, meaningful moments that honor both my grief and my love.”*

Memory ritual: Light a candle, hang a special ornament, or cook their favorite dish—symbolic acts help integrate remembrance into celebration. It helps you to move through your feelings, find peace and connection in celebration of your loved one and the holiday.

4. Reconnection Practices

Find safe spaces: Talk with someone who “gets it”—a grief companion, counselor, or trusted friend or family member.

Join support circles: Holiday grief groups can provide comfort and remind you that you’re not alone in feeling this way.

Acts of remembrance: Donate, volunteer, or give in your loved one’s name. Turning love into action channels grief into purpose.

Choose connection, not perfection: Let this holiday be imperfect, honest, and real. Presence matters more than performance.

Gentle reminder:

Grief and gratitude can coexist. Allow both space at your table this season. Peace comes not from pushing grief away—but from welcoming it as part of love’s enduring story.

5. Daily Mindfulness & Emotional Regulation

Mindful pause: When grief swells—through a song, smell, or empty chair—pause. Take three slow breaths and gently notice what arises. Awareness itself is calming.

Soothing with gratitude: At day's end, name one small comfort or connection—a friend's text, a soft blanket, a moment of quiet. These tender acknowledgments ground you in the present.

Self-compassion statements: Replace "I should be stronger" with "It's okay that I'm hurting; this shows my love still lives here." Speaking kindly to yourself softens the edges of sorrow.

Mind-body release: Try guided meditation, gentle yoga, or slow stretching—movement helps emotions flow instead of freeze.

6. Building Gentle Structure

Establish grounding rituals: Light a candle each morning in your loved one's memory, write a short reflection, or take a short walk. Rituals bring rhythm and safety amid emotional unpredictability.

Set gentle intentions: Let your daily aim be compassion, not perfection. Try saying, "Today, I'll give myself permission to rest and feel without judgment."

Plan safe emotional check-ins: Create intentional space to process. Take time to feel your feelings in a safe environment.

Simplify your schedule: Choose what truly matters this season; it's okay to scale down traditions that feel too heavy right now.

7. Seeking Guided Support

Grief coaching or counseling: Speaking with a grief-informed professional provides validation, tools, and perspective when emotions feel overwhelming.

Join community spaces: Look for grief circles, online holiday workshops, or memorial events—hearing others' stories can ease isolation and offer shared understanding.

Emotional vocabulary practice: Go beyond labeling emotions as "sad." Try naming nuances—disappointment, yearning, tenderness, fatigue. Each word gives shape to healing.

Lean into trusted support: Reach out to one safe person this season—a friend, relative, or faith leader—who can listen without trying to fix your grief. Connection is healing.

Your Actionable Checklist

1. Take one mindful pause daily (three breaths, one feeling named).
2. Keep a short "gratitude for gentle moments" journal.
3. Light a candle or practice a grounding ritual each morning or evening.
4. Set one small, realistic intention for the day—emotionally or physically.
5. Schedule one self-care or reflective check-in per week.
6. Reach out to a grief coach, counselor, or support group before the holidays.
7. Give yourself permission to feel, rest, remember, and begin again.



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