

# GRIEF & GRACE

## Making peace with the holidays when you are missing a loved one

BY LAURA HASTINGS  
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

The holidays certainly draw much of our attention this time of year. Holidays can be a time of gathering with friends and family, embracing traditions and making new memories. However, these customs can be the very same things that are difficult if you are grieving the loss of a loved one. Grief during the holidays can require a unique balance between joy and sadness.

Here are a few ideas to help navigate the holidays.

- **Try to give yourself and others grace.** Grief over a loved one, whether deceased, ill or absent, can be overwhelming, and isolating. Keep expectations of yourself and others realistic. Grief can look different for everyone. It can be messy and hard to articulate. There is also no right or wrong way to grieve.

- **Consider a pre-conversation before gatherings.** Talk with your family or friends before you attend a holiday event. Do you have requests, boundaries or needs that you can ask for ahead of time? Would you like to ask someone to accompany you or stay close by?

- **Listen to yourself.** We cannot plan, predict or control how we will feel in all situations. Maybe you had not planned on saying much about your loved one when you socialized during the holidays, but you find yourself wanting to talk about the person. Go ahead and honor your feelings in the moment and share a memory or two.

- **Write out your feelings.** Take the time to write down your feelings. Acknowledge even the ones you were not expecting. Fear, for example, might be unexpected, but it is just as legitimate. Allow and accept all the feelings. Get support from a friend, family member, spiritual mentor or professional if needed.

- **Make time for yourself.** Even under normal circumstances, holidays can be overstimulating. When you are grieving, it can be even harder to process. Allow yourself more time than usual to do daily tasks, plan an outing or get ready to see others. Also, consider giving yourself >

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time when you feel free to reminisce, look through photos and even cry.



- *Prioritize self-care.* When we miss a loved one, it can take a toll on our mind and body. Be sure to preserve time for exercise, healthful nutrition, hobbies, good sleep, fresh air and any spiritual practices if that is relevant for you.

- *Stay open to memories while you go about your day.* As you stop into stores to shop or purchase necessities, it can be overwhelming with all of the stimuli. Encourage yourself to notice one item that evokes a fond memory. For example, perhaps you recall how they always were the first one to buy the eggnog as soon as it was in the stores.

Hopefully, the holidays can be a time when you honor the feelings of missing your loved one while engaging in those opportunities that feel right and allow for positive experiences to fill your cup. ✨

*Laura Hastings is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in the Bay Area. She has a private practice in which she supports people with grief, depression, anxiety, relationship issues, work-life balance and transitions.*

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