



# Grief During Holidays

Grief is hard at any time of year. The winter holidays bring extra emphasis on family and togetherness - as the song says, "it's the time of year to be with the ones you love." Celebrations and merriment can serve to highlight the empty space created by loss, leaving people feeling more alone than ever. There is no trick that takes away the sadness but there are some things that are helpful as you navigate the challenges of the holiday season.

## Change Without Choice

Grief isn't a decision you made ("You know what I'd like to do this year? I'm going to mourn the loss of someone I love."), and it's not something you can switch off when it's inconvenient ("I'm going to take a break from grief until after the holidays are over"). Your life is changing in big and little ways. Holiday celebrations are never going to be the same.

Some people prefer to stay as close as possible to the holiday traditions that they know and love. They may take comfort in the familiarity and memories this brings. For others, trying to keep things the same is a painful reminder of the loss they've experienced and the glaring absence of their loved one.

No two losses are the same. This is why there is no single right way to grieve. Every person and every family has to figure out what works for them and what doesn't. This can be a rocky process as members of the same family may have very different needs and preferences. Acknowledge that it's hard. Decide what you want to try. Be open to changing your plan if it turns out to be harder than you thought. Remember that you can do something different next time.

Change is difficult. Change that you didn't choose is even more so. Give yourself - and each other - grace as you're doing the best you can.

**You're allowed to be Happy!** A common experience for people who are in mourning is to catch yourself smiling, laughing, or feeling happy only to be immediately crushed by a wave of guilt, as if feeling anything but sadness is an utter betrayal of the love you felt for the person who is gone. Give yourself a break. You are still alive and that means you will have moments of joy. Allow yourself to enjoy them, guilt free, when they occur naturally.



**You're under no obligation to be Happy.**

Your sadness is real. Others may tell you to cheer up or put on a smile, but you have no obligation to pretend to be happy if you're not, just to make them feel comfortable. Genuine feelings are always valid.



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## THE GRIEVER'S HOLIDAY BILL OF RIGHTS

1. You have a right to say **"TIME OUT!"** any time you need it - time to let up, blow a little steam, step away from the holidays, have a "huddle," and start over.
2. You have a right to **TELL IT LIKE IT IS**. When people ask, "How are you?" you have the right to tell them how you really feel, not just what they want to hear. You also have the right to smile and say you're fine because telling them how you really feel isn't worth your time. Some people will never understand anyway.
3. You have the right to **SOME "BAH HUMBUG" DAYS**. You are not a bad person just because you don't feel jolly.
4. You have the right to **DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY**. There is no law that says you must always do the holidays the same way you have in the past.
5. You have the right to **BE WHERE YOU WANT TO BE**. Be at home or with the relatives. Be in any city, any state you choose! There's no law that says you must stay home.
6. You have a right to **SOME FUN!** When you have a day that isn't so bad and you feel like doing something just for fun, then do it! Don't be afraid of what someone else will say if they see you laughing and having a good time. Laughter is every bit as important as tears!
7. You have a right to **CHANGE DIRECTION IN MIDSTREAM**. Holiday grief is unpredictable. You may be all ready to go somewhere or do something and suddenly feel overwhelmed. When that happens, it's okay to change your mind. There's plenty of time in life to be predictable. Exercise your right to change when you need to.
8. You have a right to **DO THINGS AT DIFFERENT TIMES**. Open presents at a different time. Serve your meal at a different time. Call it a day and go to bed at a different time! You decide, not the holiday clock.
9. You have a right to **REST, PEACE, AND SOLITUDE**. You don't have to be busy all the time. Take a nap whenever you need one. Take time to pray, to meditate, or whatever you do to recharge your spirit.
10. You have the right to **DO IT ALL DIFFERENTLY AGAIN NEXT YEAR**. Just because you change things one year—you know, try something different—does not mean you have written it in stone. Next year you can always change it back or do it yet another new way.

Adapted "Handling the Holidays" © 1992, by  
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**Crisis Help:** Sometimes grief can be so intense that a person doesn't want to go on living, or they start to view ending their own life as a way to be reunited with the one they love. If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or text '4HOPE' to 741 741. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, even on holidays.

