

9 Tips for Grieving Families Coping with the Holidays

By Dr. Robin F. Goodman



1. **Have appropriate expectations.** It is important to balance out and determine the pros and cons of trying to re-create the past and develop something new. Regardless of how hard you try, things are different and this should be recognized.
2. **Give everyone the opportunity and permission to experience their own feelings.** It can be reassuring to know that it is normal to have a tough time on certain holidays and celebrations. However, it is also acceptable and appropriate to feel hopeful and enjoy the event even when someone important is being missed.
3. **Trust yourself.** Others may offer well meant advice and suggestions but consider what is best for your own situation.
4. **Be mindful of the special needs of children.**
 - *Describe events for children.* It can be useful to be specific about what will take place so you and your children can decide the best way to participate.
 - *Keep some things the same.* Children may want some things to be exactly like they were before to help them retain a sense of normalcy and security.
 - *Share memories.* Holidays may be a good time to share memories. Activities might include preparing the person's favorite holiday food or reminisce over old videos or photos.
 - *Children may feel guilty or ambivalent about embracing new people into celebrations or enjoying themselves.* People can not and should not be replaced, new relationships take time to develop and evolve on their own. Respect and help children manage complex feelings and relationships.
 - *Involve children. Brainstorm new ways to celebrate.* Given the opportunity, children often come up with inventive and creative ideas.
5. **Be gentle with complex emotions.** If the relationship was conflicted or difficult, the holiday or occasion may trigger unresolved feelings. You now have choices about how and when to handle the past and develop future positive relationships with those who may fill nurturing roles.
6. **Reach out to others.** Different people may be a valuable resource for planning and handling various situations. For example, friends and family can share in holiday preparations, spiritual leaders are useful guides for managing and understanding rituals. It may also be a time to acknowledge those who have eased the burden and sadness of difficult days.
7. **Help others.** Some are comforted by helping others on special holidays; volunteering, bringing cookies to a hospital or nursing home, being involved in charity work.
8. **Be open to change.** Relationships and life evolve over time. What worked when children were small, or when extended family were near by may need to be revised as time goes on.
9. **Be good to yourself:** Know when and how to take a break. Activities that allow you to recharge should be a priority. Scented candles, tea with a friend, keeping to an exercise schedule, not answering the phone, are some of the many ways to manage stress, handle difficult feelings, and feel more in control.

Holidays, anniversaries and rituals can be comforting but they can grow and change over time. They can be seen as an opportunity to create a personally meaningful experience.

References

Goodman, RF. *Father's Day, The Holiday Season, September 11 Anniversary, Traditions.* Prior posting voicesofsept11.org.