

❧ Navigating Grief During the Holidays ❧

The holidays can intensify grief, making familiar traditions feel heavy. Focus on small steps to protect your energy and honor your feelings without forcing yourself into holiday cheer. Here are simple, practical ways to get through this season.

Gentle Steps for the Journey Ahead

- ◆ **Give Yourself Permission to Feel:** There is no “right” way to handle the holidays after a loss. It is okay to feel joy, it is okay to cry, and it is okay to feel numb. Honor whatever emotions arise without judgment.
- ◆ **Lower the Baseline Expectations:** Decide early what you can skip, whether it is decorating, sending cards, or hosting. Giving yourself permission to do the bare minimum removes unnecessary pressure.
- ◆ **Modify, Pause, or Drop Traditions Freely:** You are under no obligation to keep doing things the way they’ve always been done. You do not have to keep every tradition alive if it feels too painful. Choose the events that comfort you, pause or skip the ones that drain you, or create a brand new, lower stress habit in honor of your loved one. You can always return to those traditions next year.
- ◆ **Set Gentle Boundaries & Say “No” Without Guilt:** It is entirely acceptable to decline invitations that feel overwhelming or opt for quiet evenings at home. Your well being comes first. True friends and loved ones will understand you are preserving your strength.
- ◆ **Build an Exit Strategy:** If you choose to attend an event, allow yourself to stay for a short time or leave early. Arrive in your own car or arrange a clear phrase/signal with a trusted companion so you can step away or leave whenever you feel overwhelmed, no explanations needed.
- ◆ **Prepare Simple Answers for Small Talk:** Decide in advance what you’ll say when people ask how you are doing. A simple “*I’m taking things step-by-step this year*” allows you to acknowledge reality without having to open up deeper.
- ◆ **Focus on Physical Basics & Self-Care:** Grief takes a heavy physical toll. Focus on basic self care: stay hydrated, eat simple nourishing meals, take warm showers, get outside for some fresh air, and let yourself sleep or rest when you feel drained.
- ◆ **Designate a Safe Person to Talk To:** Reach out to a friend, family member, or counselor who understands you do not need them to fix your mood, but listen without judgment.

Small Ways to Honor Your Loved One

If you are navigating your first holiday season after a loss, or looking for quiet ways to keep their memory close, consider these small rituals and tributes:

- ◆ **Light a Memory Candle:** Place a special candle on the dinner table or at home and light it in their honor. A small, intentional quiet moment often feels far less overwhelming than ignoring the elephant in the room.
- ◆ **Share a Favorite Story:** Invite family members to share a cherished memory or favorite joke told by your loved one.
- ◆ **Prepare Their Favorite Recipe:** Cook a signature dish or favorite food they loved and pass down the tradition.
- ◆ **Propose a Simple Toast:** Keep it light and grounded. A brief “*To [Name], who we miss dearly today*” allows everyone at the table to share a collective moment of connection without requiring a long speech.
- ◆ **Create a Subtle Personal Ritual:** Play a single favorite song, leave a vacant seat, place a photo nearby, or write a private note to the person you lost. Dedicated space for your grief keeps it from leaking into every moment of the day.

A Gentle Reminder for the Season

Whatever you feel, whether it is sadness, comfort, or even moments of joy, is okay. Be gentle with yourselves and with one another as you take things one step at a time.

May you find comfort in the knowledge that your journey is valid, your feelings are understood, and you are supported every step of the way.

With sympathy and care, James and Shannon Curry



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