

It's the Holidays and I'm Grieving. How Am I Supposed to Feel?



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Everyone knows that the holidays are a time filled with joy and merriment. At least, they're supposed to be. What happens when you've experienced the loss of a loved one and don't feel merry? What if you don't feel anything?

The bad news is, the holidays are the worst time of year for feeling loss and pain. Everything reminds you that family and togetherness are supposed to be paramount, and you're no longer together with your loved one. The good news is, it's okay not to be joyful, and you can make it through. You need to allow yourself to feel what you're feeling and to change plans if you want to, no matter who or what those plans include. By taking time to care for yourself and what you're feeling during this time, you can make it through the holidays and begin the healing process.

The first rule of thumb for grieving is that there are no rules. Grieving is a [personal](#) process, and no one can tell you how to do it but you. You feel what you feel, and you need to allow yourself to do so in order to feel the pain and move on. Eventually, the pain will decrease if you allow yourself to feel it and not hold it in or avoid it. So do that, even during the holidays. Also, there's no rule that you cannot be happy while grieving. Remembering your loved one will hopefully bring back happy times and even funny memories. It's [okay](#) to laugh and share good times and memories with others. Those

help you to grieve as well, as you realize that your loved one would want you to be happy. The more you allow yourself to feel what you're feeling in the moment, whether it's laughing or crying, the more those memories will blend into an eventual sense of loss that's not so overwhelming and that includes happy memories too. Take your time, allow yourself to feel, and don't worry what other people think.

The second rule of grieving during the holidays is that you don't have to do anything you don't want to. If you're not sure that a big family gathering is what you want to do, then don't. Or go, but only for a short time. Don't feel like singing carols? Skip it. Volunteer to help others instead. If you know that you're not up to doing all the "normal" family holiday things, then don't try to do them anyway. Let your family and friends know what you're up for, and don't let them pressure you to do otherwise.

Have an [escape](#) plan or buddy for when you're feeling overwhelmed and only do what you feel capable of. The holidays will go on whether you're involved in them or not. Do only what you feel like doing, and then next year you can do more. It might be helpful to plan a little [memorial](#) activity for your lost loved one, to help you include them in the celebrations. Set a chair for them at the table or light a candle, or have everyone tell a story of something they remember about your loved one. Including them in small ways can help ease the pain of their not being there.

Finally, plan your holidays so that you're not alone, if possible. That's when the sadness creeps in. If you have a pet, curl up with them on the couch and watch holiday movies (or scary movies, if that's what you prefer). Invite a friend over for [hot cocoa](#) or meet them out for coffee. If you don't have a friend you can talk to about your grief, find a local [support](#) group. Get out and enjoy seasonal activities like sledding or driving around looking at the holiday lights. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Attend an ugly sweater party and go for first prize!

The point is to find things that will take your mind off of your loss and help you to focus on the good things and people around you. The more you can focus on others, the less you will focus on yourself and your pain. Eventually, the pain recedes and you're able to go on, even during the holidays.