

Easing holiday grief when loved ones are gone

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Expert suggests starting new traditions to honor the departed -- and taking care of yourself.

(HealthDay)—The holiday season can be a difficult time when someone you love has died, but there are ways to deal with your grief during this time of year, an expert says.

"There are so many traditions associated with the [holiday season](#) that it can be an emotional roller coaster for someone who has recently lost a loved one," Nancy Kiel, bereavement coordinator for Loyola University Health System in Maywood, Ill., said in a university news release.

"Many people wish they could just fast forward through the holidays, but getting through the season is possible if you give yourself permission to be flexible," she added.

Difficult moments will occur, but Kiel offered some ways to help ease grief during the holidays.

Discuss [holiday](#) plans as a family and understand that it's OK to change traditions. If the change doesn't work out, next year you can go back to the way you did things before.

You might want to start a new tradition to honor and remember your loved one, Kiel suggested. For example, light a special candle, have everyone share a favorite memory or get everyone to take part in your loved one's favorite holiday activity. Do something that would make your loved one smile, she said.

Forget about going to the mall to shop, which can be stressful even at the best of times. Instead, consider giving gift cards or shopping online, Kiel said.

Parties and social events might be more difficult to deal with, so remember that you can say no to invitations. If you go, drive yourself so you can leave at your discretion. When you're socializing, try to avoid what Kiel called "should people" who say, "You should do this," or "You should do that."

Do what you feel you need to do and pamper yourself. For example, take a [nap](#) when you feel the need or have a bubble bath to relax. Be sure to exercise, which is a great stress reliever. Keeping a journal can be another helpful way to deal with your feelings.

"Grief is hard work and it can be exhausting, but it is something we must do," Kiel said. "If you put it on a back burner, you'll never heal. You can't go around, over or under grief—you have to go through it. So find someone who will listen unconditionally and tell your story."

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has more about [coping with grief](#).

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