



HONORING LOVED ONES ON SPECIAL DAYS  
Holidays, Birthdays and Anniversaries

*“It’s hard to forget someone who gave you  
so much to remember.” - Unknown*

Special times in the years following your loved one’s death can be very challenging. The season of traditions and celebrations are not always happy times for someone who is fresh in their grief. These times can often cause a wide range of conflicting feelings and emotions. When grieving, the holiday season can sometimes become a reminder of that heartfelt sense of emptiness experienced following your loved one’s death. The celebrations and traditions you once enjoyed can evoke painful reminders of who you no longer have physically present with you.

Special days like anniversaries, birthdays and holidays can be bittersweet. Often they can trigger recollections and feelings of loss, but also memories of good times. Special days can often provide opportunity. They invite us to remember the good times shared with our loved ones. Special days can create an occasion to invite others to join with us in remembering.

Grief can be physically and mentally draining, especially at seasonal holidays and other special times. Communicate your needs clearly. Below are some ideas that you may find helpful.

#### **Communicate**

- Discuss holidays in advance to avoid misunderstandings or disappointments later.
- Discuss each of your needs in order to make it a good day.
- Share responsibilities for holiday activities with your family members.
- Plan ahead. Give yourself permission to limit social and family commitments.
- Allow yourself to have enough rest and nurturing.

#### **Create New Traditions**

- Change some of your family’s usual traditions.
- Have dinner and gift giving at a different time and location.
- If a particular ritual may cause you anxiety or despair, do not have that ritual this year. You may also choose to not be present while others do not participate.
- Share and discuss with your loved one’s how they can best support you.

#### **Cut Back on Activities**

- Skip sending cards or send less of them to the most important people in your life.
- Choose gift cards and online shopping to avoid stressful shopping.
- Prioritize your options to spend time at events and with others. Choose what feels most important to you and skip the rest.
- Don’t spread yourself too thin and be sure to get plenty of rest.

Grief workshops, counseling and resources are available to support you during your journey through grief. To request additional information, please email [adultbereavement@shands.ufl.edu](mailto:adultbereavement@shands.ufl.edu) or call 352.246.8855.

  
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**Allow Yourself to Express Your Feelings**

- Holidays often magnify feelings of loss. It is natural to feel sadness.
- Share concerns, apprehensions and feelings with a friend.
- Accept the need for support is greater during the holidays.

**Celebrate Your Loved One Who Has Died in Some Way**

- Make a gift donation in your loved one's name to an organization they would choose.
- Light a candle.
- Share special stories and memories with your closest family and friends.
- Include your loved one's favorite main dish, or dessert, as part of the holiday meal.
- Hang a stocking for your loved one in which people who visit you can put notes with their thoughts or feelings.

**Coping Through the Holiday Season**

Take a few minutes to think about the topics listed below. What items should you consider listing in each area?

1. **Things I do not need to do this holiday season:**
2. **Things I want to do this holiday season:**
3. **My plan for coping with the day of the holiday:**

Special days create an occasion to invite others to join with you in remembrance. Family members will often invite you to remember the good times you shared with your loved one. This can give you a chance to honor someone who continues to be special in your daily life. Experiencing joy again does not mean you have forgotten your loved one. It means your grief is healing.

**Helpful resources for coping with grief and loss can be found at the websites listed below:**

- [www.floridahospices.org](http://www.floridahospices.org)
- [www.hospice.net](http://www.hospice.net)
- [www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org)

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**Special Handling Please**

I was handed a package the other day.  
It was wrapped securely to be mailed away.  
Attached to the outside as plain as could be  
was a simple note for all to see.  
Please rush through the holiday season;  
Too painful to open for any reason.  
Contained within, find one broken heart -  
Fragile, broken, falling apart.  
Tried to go shopping the other day;  
The hype of the season blew me away.  
Sat down to write cards,  
That was insane.  
Couldn't find the list  
Or think of my name.  
People say,  
"Come over, be of good cheer."  
"Celebrate the holidays,  
Prepare a New Year."  
But my grief overwhelms me  
Like waves in the sea.  
Can they cope with my crying?  
An unsettled me?  
I don't have any holiday cheer.  
Decorations, traditions, big family meal,  
I can't do it this year.  
Do you know how I feel?  
Guilty and frustrated!  
I've let everyone down!  
Our holiday celebrations  
Used to be the best in town.  
So just ship me away,  
address unknown.  
When my grief is better,  
I might fly home.  
~Author, Mary J. Pinkavay -

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