

GRIEF & THE HOLIDAYS

(<http://www.grief.com>)

“The holidays are times spent with our loved ones.” This has been imprinted on our psyche from a young age. Holidays mark the passage of time in our lives. They are part of the milestones we share with each other and they generally represent time spent with family. But since holidays are for being with those we love the most, how on earth can anyone be expected to cope with them when a loved one has died? For many people, this is the hardest part of grieving, when we miss our loved ones even more than usual. How can we celebrate togetherness when there is none?

When you lose someone special, your world lacks its celebratory qualities. Holidays magnify that loss. The sadness deepens and the loneliness can feel isolating. The need for support may be the greatest during the holidays. Pretending you don't hurt and/or it isn't a harder time of the year is just not the truth for you. But you can – and will – get through the holidays. Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them. It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain. No one can take that pain away, but grief is not just pain, grief is love.

There are a number of ways to incorporate your loved one and your loss into the holidays.

Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, New Years

These are the biggest and usually most challenging of all. You can and will get through the Holidays. Rather than avoiding the feelings of grief, lean into them. It is not the grief you want to avoid, it is the pain. Grief is the way out of the pain. Grief is our internal feelings and mourning is our external expressions.

Ways to externalize the loss – give it a time and a place

- A prayer before the Holiday dinner, about your loved one.
- Light a candle for your loved one.
- Create an online tribute for them.
- Share a favorite story about your loved one.
- Have everyone tell a funny story about your loved one.
- At your place of worship remember them in a prayer.
- Chat online about them.

Ways to Cope

Have a Plan A/Plan B – Plan A is you go to that holiday dinner with family and friends and if it doesn't feel right, have your plan B ready. Plan B may be watching a movie you both liked, or looking through a photo album, or going to a special place you went to together. Many people find that when they have Plan B in place, just knowing it is there is enough.

Cancel the holiday altogether. Yes, you can cancel the holiday. If you are going through the motions and feel nothing, cancel them. Take a year off. The holidays will come around again and will always be there. For other people, staying involved with the holidays is a symbol of life continuing. Let the holiday routine give you a framework during these tough times, and lean on a holiday support system.

Try the holidays in a new way. Grief has a unique way of giving us permission to evaluate what parts of the holidays we enjoy and what parts we don't. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays in grief. You have to decide what is right for you and do it. You have every right to change your mind, even a few times. Friends and family members may not have a clue how to help you through this time of year, and you may not either.

It is very natural to feel you may never enjoy this time of year again. They will certainly never be the same as before your loved one's death. However, in time, most people are able to find meaning again in the traditions as a new form of the holiday spirit grows inside of them. Even without grief, our friends and relatives often think they know how our holidays should look, what "the family" should and shouldn't do.

Do's and Don'ts

- Do be gentle with yourself and protect yourself.
- Don't do more than you want, and don't do anything that does not serve your soul and your loss.
- Do allow time for the feelings.
- Don't keep feelings bottled up. If you have 500 tears to cry don't stop at 250.
- Do allow others to help. We all need help at certain times in our lives.
- Don't ask if you can help or should help a friend in grief. Just help. Find ways; invite them to group events or just out for coffee.
- Do, in grief, pay extra attention to the children. Children are too often the forgotten grievers.

Valentines Day

Valentines Day is a day to honor our spouse, girlfriend / boyfriend or anyone we are romantically involved with in the present. The past can represent a hole in your heart where your loved one used to be.

Tips

- Write a love letter
- Smile a smile for them
- Light a red candle
- Tell someone about them

Mother's Day and Father's Day

Mother and Fathers Day are often thought of as an invisible sad day of mourning while many people are rushing around trying to get that perfect gift or make sure they remember to send mom / dad a card. There are over one hundred million Americans that for them, this is a sad day. Either because they have a mother or father who has died or a child has died.

Tips

- Find ways to honor and remember your mother/ father or both. Think of ways to honor your child.
- Light a candle

- Say a prayer
- Donate time or money in their name.
- Do something you loved to do together on that day.

It isn't as important how you remember, you honor them by the fact that you remember.

Just Remember

Holidays are clearly some of the roughest terrains we navigate after a loss. Finding meaning in the loss is as individual as we are. We often say a part of us died with them, but finding meaning is also realizing a part of them still lives within us. What is vitally important is that we be present for the loss in whatever form the holidays do or don't take. These holidays are part of the grieving journey that we must fully feel. They are usually very sad, but sometimes we may catch ourselves doing okay, and we may even have a brief moment of laughter. Now more than ever, be gentle with yourself. Don't do more than you want, and don't do anything that does not serve your soul, your loss, or the meaning that still lives within you.

Holiday Survival Strategies for Coping with Grief

(<http://www.verywellhealth.com>)

Medically reviewed by Carly Snyder, MD on November 06, 2019

Written by Angela Morrow, RN



For anyone dealing with an illness, grief, or the loss of a loved one, the holidays can be a time of sadness, pain, anger, or dread. It can be difficult to cope, especially when you see the sights and sounds of holiday happiness all around you.

The ebb and flow of grief can become overwhelming with waves of memories, particularly during Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Grief can also magnify the stress that is often already a part of the holidays. How can you begin to fill the emptiness you feel when it seems that everyone else is overflowing with joy? There are a few strategies that you can employ to help you get through this time.

Offer Yourself Some Grace

One of the best things you can do is give yourself permission to feel whatever it is you're feeling. Try not to fall prey to the belief that you have to feel a certain way or do certain things in order to make the holiday “normal.” If you feel sad, allow the tears to come; if you feel angry, allow yourself to vent some steam.

Be Kind to Yourself

It's important that you get the rest and nourishment you need and try not to take on more than you can handle. If you need to be alone, then honor that. If you crave the company and affection of others, seek it out. Do whatever feels right to you during this difficult time.

Ask For and Accept Help

The holiday season is no time to feign strength and independence when you're grieving a death. You will need the help and support of others to get through, so don't feel as if you are a burden. People generally receive satisfaction and even joy from helping those they care about.

After a death, people often desire to help but simply don't know how. If you need someone to help you prepare meals, shop, or decorate, this is the time to speak up and make your needs known. Quite often, they will be delighted to feel like they are helping you in some way.

The same holds true for your emotional needs. Friends and family members might feel uncomfortable talking about your grief. They might think that you don't want to talk about it and don't want to be reminded of your pain.

The American Psychological Association (APA) notes that not talking about someone's death lead to isolation and discourage those who are there to support you. Again, you will have to tell your loved ones the best way that they can help you. If you want to talk about what you're going through, or you just need a shoulder to cry on, let them know.

Find Support

Sharing your feelings is often the best way to get through them and finding people you can talk to will help. Friends and relatives can be a great support during times of grief. However, they might be coping with their own feelings or so immersed in the holidays that they cannot offer the support you need.

Another good option is to look for a grief support group. You can search online or check with local churches, community centers, funeral homes, or a hospice to find a group that suits you. Support group members often make friends that end up being a source of comfort and care for many years to come.

Make a Difference

Many people like to help others in large or small ways during the holiday season. We may drop our change in a charity basket, purchase a gift for a needy child, or donate to a favorite organization. This can help us feel like we are contributing to the greater good.

Likewise, helping improve the lives of others can help take the focus off your loss. Studies show that volunteering can be beneficial to our mental health, particularly as we age.

Consider volunteering at a nursing home, hospital, hospice, children's shelter, or soup kitchen. You can also find a way to help another family member or friend who may need it. Any of these things can prove cathartic and help in the healing process.

Stop Making Comparisons

It's easy to see other people or families enjoying holiday festivities and compare their experience to what you feel during this difficult time. This may make you feel worse or that you're lacking in some fashion.

Keep in mind that the holidays are stressful for most people and they are rarely the "magical" gatherings depicted in greeting cards, movies, or on television. Try to embrace what you have rather than compare it to what you think others have.

A Word from [verywellhealth.com](https://www.verywellhealth.com)

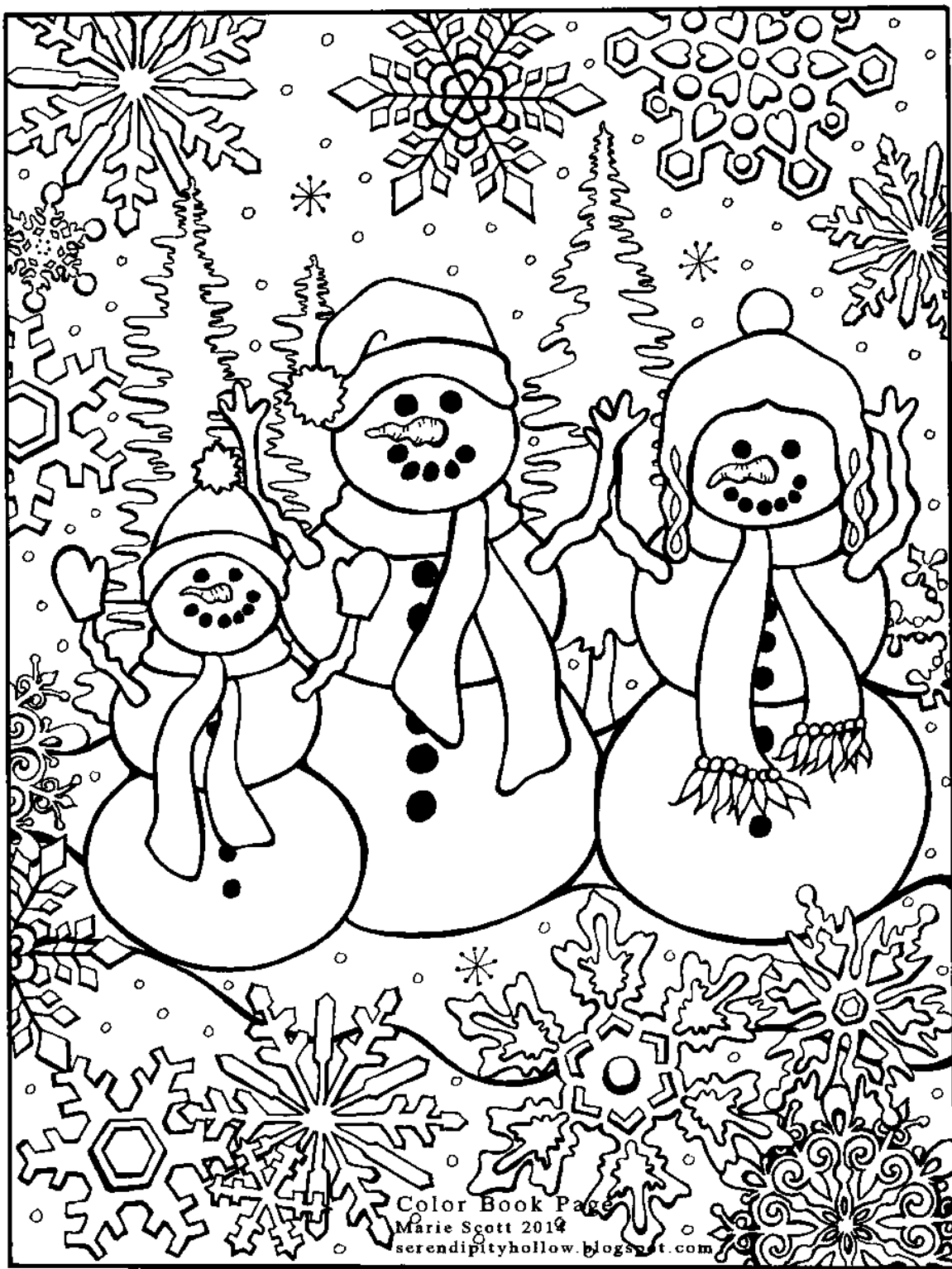
As difficult as it seems, you will survive the holidays in one piece. Because of your grief, this holiday might prove to be a very difficult experience. However, you will get through it and come out on the other side stronger than before. You don't necessarily have to enjoy the holidays or even go through the motions of pretending to enjoy the festivities.

That said, it's also fine to have a good time in spite of your grief. If happiness slips through your window of grief, allow it to happen and enjoy it. You won't be doing your loved one an injustice by feeling joyous. The best gift you can give anyone you love is that of being true to yourself and living your life to the fullest, even as you adjust to the loss and remember your loved one.

Coloring Pages

Whether you are 6 or 60 years old, coloring can be a relaxing activity.

Here are a few holiday and winter themed prints.



Color Book Page
Marie Scott 2014
serendipityhollow.blogspot.com

