



Facing loss during the holidays.

When distance and circumstance prevent us from being with those we love during the holidays, we may find ourselves sad and lonely. And if we've lost someone close to us, the holidays will likely feel less bright this year. When others are celebrating, we may experience emotions that include resentment, anxiety, emptiness and grief. How can we manage these normal reactions and find ways to soothe our sadness? Can we allow ourselves to find ways to connect to others, to look for ways to make the holidays meaningful if not joyful? Here are a few suggestions that may help you survive:

Don't pretend. Rather than putting on a "happy face" when you aren't feeling so merry, give yourself permission to feel your emotional truth. Acknowledging what you feel allows you to express and release painful emotions so that you don't carry them around. Write a letter to the ones you won't be with. Letting go is easier once you have put a name on a feeling. "I will really miss seeing you this season." This can open a discussion of ways to connect without being physically together.

Be gentle with yourself. If a loved one has died this year, you are especially vulnerable right now. You may wonder if you'll ever enjoy the holidays again in the same way. Take things day by day. You will have some better days and can reach out to others when you have the energy. You have the right to change your mind. Ask for what you need. You'll be surprised how others will include you and how taking part in small ways may ease your sadness.

You have choices. When loss or circumstance changes how we spend the holidays, it can be an opportunity to create new traditions. The world isn't the same now so no need to do what has always been done for the holidays. What feels appropriate is different for each of us. What brings you peace? How can you honor a loved one who is no longer with you? Who do you know that has been through what you are facing now? Consider talking with them about their experience.

We grieve because we loved. This doesn't make our pain easier but it does help us see some reason. While the person is gone, the love isn't. We can manage to journey from grief to gratitude, however long it takes. We don't have to take the journey alone, we can reach out for help. From a friend, from family members, from a professional. And we can look forward to a time when we will again find joy in celebrating with others.

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