

Holiday wishes

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As we move into another holiday season, people living with serious illness and grief may feel their losses even more strongly. World events add to this pain and weigh heavily on many.

Be kind to yourself. If you don't feel like celebrating, socializing, or being merry this year - or if you do - that is perfectly alright. Getting through is enough. Connect with those close to you in a way that seems manageable. Allow space for your losses and your grief.

Everyone's grief is different. What may work for one person may not work for another. And what may have helped in the past may not have the same effect now. We've gathered a variety of resources for you to consider. We hope you will find something that resonates with you that will be helpful as you carry your losses this holiday season, or support someone else who is grieving.

We wish you comfort, care, and peace.

Grief in times of celebration: The empty spot

[Read more](#)

From Canadian Virtual Hospice

This article by Rev. Dr. Glen R. Horst, retired Canadian Virtual Hospice Spiritual Care Advisor, shares ideas for honouring our losses, adapting and creating new traditions, finding support, and holding our grief alongside celebration. Below are suggestions from the article.

Try to respect your limits and care for yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Adapt holiday plans to whatever feels best for you. Look after your body's needs for food and movement. You may want to plan a quiet space for reflection.



You might find it helpful to:

- Mark the empty spot at a holiday meal with a photograph or other memento.
- Have photos of the person displayed to encourage sharing memories.
- Keep a candle lit during the holiday meal or throughout the holidays in the person's honour.



Create new traditions (or adapt old ones).

Traditions can help give your family a sense of stability and hope in the midst of loss and change. Experiment with what works for you and what doesn't.



Consider attending events for people grieving during the holidays.

It can be helpful to connect with others who are going through something similar. You can usually find online and in-person events through a local hospice, funeral home, or google search.



If you feel up to it, connect with the outside world.

- Gather with friends or family but give yourself permission to leave anytime.
- Participate in community events whether cultural, faith-based, or otherwise.
- Volunteer or donate to a meaningful cause.
- Do an act of kindness.



Remember...

There is no one “right” way to approach the holidays when you are grieving. Be kind to yourself and do as much or as little feels best for you.



10 Ideas for honouring your loss during the holidays

From the Canadian Grief Alliance

10 Ideas

*for honouring your loss
during the holidays*

Canadian Grief Alliance 

1. Set a place at the holiday table for the person who died. Place a special object or photo there.
2. Invite guests to write a memory about the person on a slip of paper and put it into a box, jar, or stocking to be read and shared later.
3. Volunteer or donate to a cause that the person cared about.

Canadian Grief Alliance 

4. Write a holiday letter to the person who died.

5. Make a favourite dish of the person who died.

6. Buy a gift that your person would have loved and donate it to a shelter.

7. Make or buy a memorial ornament.

Canadian Grief Alliance 

8. Make meaningful gifts of the person's belongings (ie. Give the person's favourite scarf to a surviving grandchild).

9. Visit a place the person loved.

10. Plan time to journal or reflect on this holiday without the person.

Canadian Grief Alliance 

Finding grief services and events in your area

Many communities put on special events or activities to support those grieving over the holidays. To see what is available in your area check out:

- Your local hospice.
- Community grief organizations.
- Local faith-based organizations.

[AboutGrief.ca](https://www.aboutgrief.ca) has searchable listings of hospice and grief organizations.

Programs and Services

Suggestions for the holidays

From Victoria Hospice

TIPS FOR COPING WITH HOLIDAY GRIEF

Decide how you want to spend the holiday.

Allow yourself to think about what you most need and want to do. It's OK if you want to change things completely, just a little, or not at all.



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Plan your activities in advance.

Before the holiday season is in full swing, create a plan that can be adjusted according to your needs. Let people who are important to you know what your plans are and if you are open to invitations.

Expect things to be different.

Holidays are often spent with the people we are closest to and you are missing someone important. You may be feeling down and not up to your usual activities. However, you may also enjoy seeing people and participating in some events.

Take time to care for yourself.

Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel and to spend time alone or with others as needed. Take time out for rest and physical activity and avoid over-indulging in food and/or alcohol.

Be flexible about holiday traditions.

Without the person you've lost, you may not be able to do all the holiday things you'd normally do. Consider reducing or foregoing activities that aren't essential, and asking for help with anything you'd like to continue.

Give to others.

Sometimes the sadness and loneliness of grief during the holidays can be lightened a little by caring for others. Consider hosting a pre- or post-holiday gathering for friends and family or perhaps volunteering at a local shelter or charity.

Do something to remember your loved one.

You may want to continue a favorite tradition or start something new. Perhaps an annual walk in a special place, or creating a special ornament or decoration, or even making a holiday food item that your loved one particularly enjoyed.

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Honour a loss

[Learn more](#)

Canadian Healing Quilt ([HealingQuilt.ca](https://healingquilt.ca)) provides one way to honour and remember someone who has died. Family and friends can gather virtually to share stories, photos, and special memories in a lasting digital memorial quilt square. The process of creating a quilt square can be helpful to those who are grieving. Visitors can light virtual candles, leave messages, and share memories on memorials. There is no cost to create or maintain a memorial quilt square.

Support when you need it

[MyGrief.ca](https://mygrief.ca) is a free service to help you as you grieve, whether your loss is recent or in the near or distant past. It also provides those supporting someone who is grieving with helpful guidance.

If you work in healthcare, [The Learning Hub](https://thelearninghub.ca) has specialized content for the grief you maybe facing related to your work.

[AboutGrief.ca](https://aboutgrief.ca) is Canada's national grief website, home to articles, videos and hundreds of resources to help you better understand and respond to grief.

Grief and the Holidays Q&A 2024

Grief specialists Marney Thompson, MA, and Maxxine Rattner, PhD, welcomed attendees to honour their losses and discuss their most pressing questions about grief and the holidays at this event on Dec. 9, 2024.



Grief and the Holidays Q&A 2023

Grief specialists Marney Thompson, MA, Chris MacKinnon, PHD, and Maxxine Rattner, PhD, welcomed attendees to honour their losses and discuss their most pressing questions about grief and the holidays at this event on Dec. 6, 2023.



Tips for supporting someone during the holidays

From Megan Devine, Refuge in Grief



For Veterans and families

This resource from the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families shares ideas to make the holiday season a little happier and less stressful for Veteran Families.

[Read more](#)



Debbie, a family member of a military veteran, shares the difficulty of carrying her family's expectations for holiday gatherings when she is no longer the same person following her loss. This video is part of a project Canadian Virtual Hospice (CVH) is partnering with Veterans Affairs Canada on to support Veterans and their families living with grief.

64 reminders if you're filled with holiday dread

From *What's Your Grief?*

It is common to dread the holiday season when you have experienced loss. These reminders may help.

[View](#)

What to say

From Help Texts

12 Things to Say to a Grieving Friend Instead of “Happy Holidays!”

I'm thinking of you during this season.

I'm here for you if you need to talk or just be together.

It's okay to remember and honor [deceased's name]
during the holidays. I'm thinking of them too.

I know this season can be tough; I'm here to support you.

You don't have to put on a brave/merry face for me.

It's okay to grieve, no matter how long it's been.

Take it one day at a time. I'll keep checking in.

Your feelings are valid, and I'm here to listen.

If you need a break from the holiday rush, I'm here to help.

I'm lighting a candle/hanging an ornament/baking cookies
this year in memory of [deceased's name].

I can run errands or help wrap gifts if you need.

If you'd like, we can adjust our plans to make this holiday
more low-key and peaceful.



help TEXTS

#12DaysofGriefmas

Give a Mile Holiday Campaign

Give A Mile has been providing free flights to families facing serious illness since 2013, "because the cost of a flight should never be the

[Learn more](#)

reason that someone dies alone." Connect with
Give a Mile to donate points or apply for a flight.

Supporting children and youth

This handout from Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre aims to support family discussion about what you and your child are thinking and feeling about the holiday season.

[Download](#)

The Dougy Center's Holiday Tip Sheet and Holiday Plan Worksheet help families to make a plan and navigate the holiday season in a way that supports each family member's needs.

[Download](#)

KidsGrief Q&A: Supporting grieving kids during the holidays

In this webinar recording, children's grief specialist Andrea Warnick shares guidance on supporting kids who have experienced loss during the holidays.



[KidsGrief.ca](https://www.kidsgrief.ca) shares strategies for the holidays and a video by David about how he and his kids approached the holidays after the death of his wife and their mom.

[Learn more](#)

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