

STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

Managing Grief during the Holidays

December is the feel-good season with family vacations, shopping for gifts, partying with friends and colleagues, and festive decorations around every corner. Yet, there are those among us who dread being amid all this love and laughter.

For someone who has recently lost a loved one, the holidays are a painful reminder of their grief. Losing a loved one can be a profound experience at any time of the year. But the holidays often renew feelings of sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, emptiness, and even anger or resentment. The pain may surface as physiological symptoms, such as loss of appetite or insomnia.

Even when participating in the festivities, a grieving person may feel guilt for attempting to overcome the memories. Here are a few things you can do to help alleviate some of the pain and inner conflict.

■ Lean into the Uncomfortable Emotions

Your attempts to avoid emotional distress may amplify anguish. Trying to dodge the discomfort you feel around the holidays can keep you in a downward spiral of pain and misery. Instead, acknowledge your feelings of isolation, hurt and despair. Allow the grief to coexist with your desire to bounce back to life and enjoy the holiday season — both feelings are valid and real.

■ Set Boundaries

Festive events and gatherings can trigger memories of the times spent with your loved one and make it harder to bear their absence. One way to deal with the grief is to restrict the number of holiday celebrations you attend this year. Let your friends and family know your decision on how much (or how little) you want to be involved in the gatherings and celebrations.





■ Is It Time for New Holiday Traditions?

It's only natural to want to honor the memory of your loved one by continuing the holiday traditions you had together. Could your efforts to recreate the memories be triggering your grief? Only you can make this very personal assessment. But maybe it's time to think about which time-honored traditions you'd like to keep, while creating new ones that may inspire you.

■ Prioritize Self Care

During the hectic holiday season take time to prioritize self-care.

- Be kind to yourself and others.
- Allow yourself to grieve at your own pace and in your own way.
- Make a plan for how you want to spend your time and energy.
- Be flexible.
- Drink lots of water.
- Get a lot of sleep.
- Limit alcohol use.
- Eat healthy food.
- Get some exercise — remember to move.
- Connect with people.
- Accept support.
- Trust that grief and mourning are part of healing.



■ Give Back

Helping others may alleviate your pain and give you a sense of purpose at an overwhelming time. Consider cooking a meal for a friend who does not have local family or who is without needed resources. Visit a nursing home holiday event, serve a meal at a soup kitchen, or donate gifts at an orphanage. People who are grieving consistently report that engaging with others in these ways offers relief.



■ Find Support

Grief is reduced when you share it so if you don't have the support to do that, seek help. Reach out to the UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center (EACC) for help and support, or to share what's on your mind. You'll discover confidentiality, empathy, and very likely workable solutions to issues you are struggling with right now. You can also look for local community centers and religious organizations that may offer grief support groups. There are online support groups, too. Talking with a therapist can provide a safe, non-judgmental space to process your grief.



■ Contact UAB EACC

- uab.edu/eacc
- 205-934-2281
- 1-877-872-2327 (toll free in Alabama)

Remember that prioritizing self-care and making a concerted effort to recognize, process and tackle the emotional triggers during the holiday season will help you combat personal grief.