

Grief and the Holidays: 15 Ways to Cope

1. **Realize this year will be different.** Don't compare this holiday with the nostalgia of past holidays. Acknowledge that the holidays may not be the same as those in the past.
2. **Expect emotions to intensify.** Accept the likelihood that the holidays may be painful.
3. **Plan ahead.** Pace yourself. Set realistic limits and lower expectations. It is okay to say "no" to things like sending cards, decorating and buying gifts.
4. **Be flexible** and patient with yourself and others.
5. **Tell others what you need.** Others may not know how to help you and need to be told. Communicate your needs.
6. **Be gentle with yourself.** Give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel.
7. **Remember your physical needs.** Don't abandon healthy habits like exercising, eating right and getting plenty of sleep.
8. **Make new holiday rituals.** When you do things differently, it tells others that your life is different. Light a candle, walk, pray, or do whatever feels right for YOU.
9. **Honor traditions.** Let family know what traditions are meaningful for you and which are painful. It is okay to let some traditions go.
10. **Take 5 minute "mini mental breaks."** Sit down, practice deep breathing and simply close your eyes. Alternatively, go for a walk, listen to music or meditate.
11. **Stay involved.** Meet together as a family and share what each needs to make these holidays special and be willing to change the normal routine.
12. **Lean on your faith for strength.** Touch base with your spirituality, which can bring comfort, strength, peace and wisdom. Explore what gives your own life meaning.
13. **Remember to remember.** Celebrate the memory of your loved one in a way that helps you cope.
14. **Find moments of joy.** Remember that your loved one would want nothing but your happiness over the holidays. Don't feel guilty to laugh, joke or find joy in the simple things in life.
15. **Do what is right for YOU.** At the end of the day, everyone grieves differently and has different coping needs. Use these tips to find your healthy way to cope.

-Chris Quistad, Ecumen's Director of Spiritual Care

