

## How to get through the holidays while grieving, from the Harvard Mental Health Letter

Written by Raquel Schott

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BOSTON— Each year, more than two million men, women, and children die in the United States, leaving behind loved ones who mourn them. The holidays are often the most difficult time of the year for people who are grieving.

“If the grief is fresh, holiday cheer can seem like an affront and celebrations may underscore how alone people feel,” notes Dr. Michael Miller, editor in chief of the [Harvard Mental Health Letter](#). The following strategies, explored in depth in the December 2011 issue, may help people who are grieving to cope with the holidays.

**Start a new tradition.** During a holiday dinner, place a lighted candle on the dinner table, leave an empty chair, or say a few words of remembrance.

**Change the celebration.** Go out to dinner instead of planning an elaborate meal at home. Or schedule a trip with friends.

**Express your needs.** People who are grieving may find it hard to participate in all the festivities or may need to let go of unsatisfying traditions. It’s all right to tell people you’re just not up to it right now or to change plans at the last minute.

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**Help someone else.** It may also help to volunteer through a charitable or religious organization. Make a donation to a favorite cause in memory of the person who died.

**Give yourself time.** The grieving process doesn't neatly conclude at the six-month or one-year mark. Depending on the strength of the bond that was broken, grief can be life-long. Nevertheless, grief does usually soften and change over time. With time, the holidays will become easier to handle.

**Read the full-length article:** [“Handling holidays and difficult times”](#)

Also in this issue:

- The normal process of grieving
- Beyond the five stages of grief
- How people can help themselves while grieving
- Coping with complicated grief
- How long does grief last?

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