

Coping at Christmas when you are grieving



The run up to Christmas and Christmas Day can be an emotional time of the year, whether you are facing the first Christmas since a loved one died or whether they died many years ago. Sometimes it helps to give some thought in advance to what will be most helpful for you. Here are some suggestions others have found of benefit.

- Acknowledge that Christmas will be tough: decide which traditions you want to keep and which ones you want to change. Nothing is set in stone and you might make different choices next year. Perhaps introduce a new tradition in memory of your loved one. Think about how you would like them remembered at this time. This might be in a favourite photo, through music, their favourite meal or a quiet moment in the presence of a lit candle.
- Choose the people you want to spend time with, ask for help and accept help from those who know what you need best. Choose which event you want to attend and only do what you feel comfortable with. Keep things simple and do not feel pressured into making plans.
- If you have young children, the motivation to make Christmas a happy time for them can be emotionally draining. Include your children in Christmas planning and reassure them that it is ok to enjoy Christmas.
- Accept offers of help so that you can have some quiet time, while others spend time with the children. It is important to acknowledge how you feel.

- Be patient with others, people do not grieve in the same way. There is no right way to grieve but it is important to be open about how you are feeling in order for others to support you.
- Build in some physical exercise time even if it is just a family walk, this might be a new tradition to remember and talk about the person who has died.
- Be alert if you are turning to alcohol or drugs to numb the pain and if this is the case try to speak to someone who knows you well or your GP.
- If Christmas Day is too much, make an alternative plan. Try to do something with the day no matter how simple. Perhaps go to church or watch a Christmas movie.
- Do not feel guilty about the choices you make or about enjoying yourself and feeling happy. This does not diminish your love for the person or how much you miss them.

For many people coping with Christmas will be difficult especially if they have suffered the loss of a family member, friend or colleague during the previous year. To those of you reading this who are grieving we hope that you will be comforted by those around you and memories of happier times. Remind yourself that you are on a grief journey and some days may be harder than others but at Christmas time there are many things happening to lift your spirits and it is ok to feel joy and comfort.

Many bereavement support organisations have developed advice to help people who are grieving and dreading how they will feel during the festive season. We hope you might find this information helpful if you are grieving or if you are supporting others who have been bereaved.

- Cruse how to cope with Grief at Christmas
- <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/coping-grief-christmas>
- Irish Hospice Foundation – Bereaved at Christmas
- Winston’s Wish – Coping with grief at Christmas
- Compassionate Friends – Coping at Christmas for parents
- SANDS NI – Coping at Christmas

