

# Remembering Lost Loved Ones During the Holidays

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# Dispel the Misconceptions About Grief

**Misconception 1: Grief and mourning are the same thing** - Simply stated, grief is the internal thoughts and feelings we experience when someone we love dies. Mourning, on the other hand, is taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it outside ourselves.

**Misconception 2: Grief and mourning progress in predictable, orderly stages** - Grief is neither predictable nor orderly.

**Misconception 3: You should move away from grief, not toward it** - In order to heal you must move toward your grief through continued mourning, not away from it through repression and denial.

**Misconception 4: Tears of grief are only a sign of weakness** - Tears are not a sign of weakness. In fact, crying is an indication of the griever's willingness to do the "work of mourning."

**Misconception 5: Being upset and openly mourning means you are being "weak" in your faith** - Mourning is a spiritual journey of the heart and soul.

**Misconception 6: When someone you love dies, you only grieve and mourn for the physical loss of the person.** - As a result of the death, you may lose many other connections to yourself and the world around you.

**Misconception 7: You should try not to think about the person who died on holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays** - On special occasions it's natural for your grief to well up inside you and spill over—even long after the death itself.

**Misconception 8: After someone you love dies, the goal should be to "get over" your grief as soon as possible** - We do not resolve or recover from our grief. Mourners do, however, learn to reconcile their grief.

**Misconception 9: Nobody can help you with your grief** - Grieving and mourning may be the hardest work you have ever done. Sharing your pain with others won't make it disappear, but it will, over time, make it more bearable.

**Misconception 10: When grief and mourning are finally reconciled, they never come up again** - As your experience has probably already taught you, grief comes in and out like waves from the ocean.

# “Here I Am” Meditation

- Resolve to meditate for at least five minutes. Do not answer the phone or allow yourself to be distracted from your goal.
- Be seated and say to yourself, “Here I am seated, doing nothing. I will do nothing for five minutes” (or longer, depending on the time you set for yourself).
- Begin noticing your own bodily presence—how your body feels next to the chair; how our feet feel against the floor. Relax your body. Notice what you feel inside.
- Now notice the presence of all that is around you. Say to yourself, “Here I am in the presence of the room (garden, chapel, wherever you are).” Be aware of the furniture, walls, and any pets or people in the room. Just be present and silent in your environment. Relax even more.
- Now say to yourself, “Here I am in the presence of love.” Repeat silently, “Here I am.” Bask in the presence of love until your time goal has been reached.

Adapted from *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* by Teresa A. Blythe, Abingdon Press

# Understand the Six Needs of Mourning

1. **Accept the reality of the death** – Gently confront the reality that someone you care about will never physically come back into your life again.
2. **Let yourself feel the pain of the loss** – Embrace the pain of your loss – something we naturally don't want to do. It is in confronting our pain that we learn to reconcile ourselves to it.
3. **Remember the person who died** – You have a relationship of memory. Allow and encourage yourself to pursue this relationship.
4. **Develop a new self-identity** – When someone with whom you have a relationship dies, your self-identity, or the way you see yourself, naturally changes.
5. **Search for meaning** – Early in your grief, allow yourself to openly mourn without pressuring yourself to have answers to profound “meaning of life” questions. Move at your own pace as you recognize that allowing yourself to hurt and finding meaning are not mutually exclusive. More often, your need to mourn and find meaning in your continued living will blend into each other, with the former giving way to the latter as healing occurs.
6. **Let others help you—now and always** – The quality and quantity of understanding support you get during your work of mourning will have a major influence on your capacity to heal. You cannot—nor should you try to—do this alone.

Adapted from *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., Companion Press

## **Reflection questions:**

What are your concerns about the holidays?

What is your plan for specific days?

How would you like to remember your loved one during the holidays?

# The Griever's Holiday Bill of Rights

By Bruce H. Conley

1. You have a right to say “time out.” Any time you need to, take a “time out” to let up, blow off a little steam, step away from the holidays, have a quiet moment and start over.
2. You have a right to tell it like it is. When people ask, “How are you?” you have the right to tell them how you really feel, not just what they want to hear.
3. You have the right to some “bah humbug” days. You don't have to be jolly and upbeat all of the time.
4. You have the right to do things differently. There is no law that says you must always do the holidays the same way. You can do ten cards instead of hundreds, or no cards at all! You can open presents at someone else's house. You can eat pizza instead of turkey!
5. You have the right to be where you want to be. Be at home or with relatives. Be in any city or state of your choice.
6. You have the right to have some fun. When you have a day that isn't so bad and you feel like doing something fun, then do it. Don't be afraid of what someone else will say if they see you laughing and having a good time. Laughter is just as important as tears.
7. You have the right to change directions in mid-stream. Holiday grief is unpredictable. You may be all ready to go somewhere or do something and suddenly be overwhelmed. When that happens, it's okay to change your mind. There's plenty of time in life to be predictable. Exercise your right to change when you need to.
8. You have the right to do things at different times. Go to church at different times. Open presents at a different time. Serve your meal at a different time. Give up and go to bed at a different time! Don't be a slave to the holiday clock.
9. You have the right to rest, peace and solitude. You don't need to be busy all the time. Take a nap whenever you need one. Take time to pray and to meditate, to recharge your spirit. It may do you much more good than eating another huge meal!
10. You have the right to do it all differently again next year. Just because you change things one year- you know, try something different- does not mean you have written it in stone. Next year, you can always change it back or do it in yet another way.

*Taken from <http://blog.crossroadshospice.com/the-grievers-holiday-bill-of-rights/>*

# Ways to Remember Your Loved Ones

- Light a memorial candle at the table or for several hours on a special day.
- Plan a remembering celebration with family or friends. Exchange stories about your loved one. Serve his or her favorite foods. Share a toast.
- Duplicate and frame favorite photo(s) of your loved one for family gifts.
- Make a list of all the ways your loved one enriched your life and continues to influence you.
- Visit favorite places from your life with your loved one and savor your memories.
- Do something your loved one enjoyed: attend a play, concert, theme park or baseball game.
- Plant a tree or dedicate a memorial brick or a park bench in your loved one's name.
- Create something: a quilt or teddy bear from your loved one's favorite clothes.
- Plant a garden or set up a bird feeder in your loved one's favorite place.
- Arrange for remembrance of your loved one at a Mass or other religious service.
- Donate flowers/plants to your church, synagogue or place of worship in honor of your loved one.
- Donate objects or materials to be used in worship or education in your loved one's name.
- Set up a memorial scholarship or fund in honor of your loved one.
- Make a donation to your loved one's favorite charity.
- Volunteer your time to a person in need or to an organization in honor of your loved one.
- Visit/bring flowers to the cemetery.

Adapted from <http://www.vitas.com/hospice-care-services/bereavement-and-grief-resources/remembering-loved-ones-on-holidays>

# 4-3-2-1 on Hope, Healing and Wholeness

## 4 Practices

1. Centeredness – going within and connecting to that hidden wholeness
2. Creativity – thinking outside the box and finding meaningful new ideas and ways of being.
3. Community – sharing yourself with others and others sharing themselves with you.
4. Caring - compassionately serving self and others

## 3 Skills

1. Attending – Learn to listen
2. Befriending – You have to feel it if you want to heal it
3. Surrendering – To let it go, you have to let it flow  
*-Taken from *Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair**

## 2 Intentions

1. To heal, grow and be transformed
2. To look for light along the way

## 1 Posture

1. Openness

Although you and your loved one will be apart  
May the spirit of the holidays comfort your heart  
And may its message of peace be with you each day  
To help and guide you along life's way

- Donna Kalb

Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak  
Whispers the o'er fraught heart and bids it break.

- William Shakespeare

Turn your face to the sun, and the shadows fall behind you.

- Maori proverb

In the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the  
heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair.

- Howard Thurman

### **What to do in the Darkness**

Go slowly  
Consent to it  
But don't wallow in it  
Know it as a place of germination  
And growth  
Remember the light  
Take an outstretched hand if you find one  
Exercise unused senses  
Find the path by walking it  
Practice trust  
Watch for dawn.

- Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

Tears are the silent language of grief.

- Voltaire

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one  
can steal.

- From a headstone in Ireland

“We continued talking as my purchases were rung up—about the first Christmas, the sadness of ending up in a cemetery on a holiday, and the pain of getting through that first year.

“They tell me it gets better,” she said with a sigh.

“Can I give you a hug?” I asked shyly before I turned to go. She nodded eagerly, and one small sob escaped her as I squeezed her shoulders tightly.

I might look back on that first Christmas and remember it as the year I did so many things so badly, the year I forgot to feed my family.

Or I might just remember it as the Christmas I learned what it meant to reach out to a hurting stranger.”

- *Mary Potter Kenyon*

“Sorrow has its reward. It never leaves us where it found us.”

- *Mary Baker Eddy*

A cut finger—

is numb before it bleeds,  
it bleeds before it hurts,  
it hurts until it begins to heal,  
it forms a scab and itches until  
finally, the scab is gone and a  
small scar is left where once there  
was a wound.

Grief is the deepest wound you have  
ever had. Like a cut finger, it goes  
through the process of healing  
and leaves a scar.

- *Doug Manning*

Darkness deserves gratitude.

It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand  
that all growth does not take place in the sunlight.

- *Joan Chittister*

She was no longer wrestling with the grief, but could sit down with it as  
a lasting companion and make it a sharer in her thoughts.

- *George Eliot*



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