

To Survive Christmas after the loss of a loved one

always follow the golden rule of grief:

there are no rules



- > Let people know how you feel
- > You do not have to do it all; if at all
- > Create a new tradition
- > You can change your mind
- > Do what feels right for you
- > You are not going crazy

Grief is as unique and individual as the person who is experiencing it. Nowhere is it written that you must follow a regimented sequence of emotions and behaviours. And nor should there be: it is an impossibility. Many different people can suffer the same type of loss but will cope in entirely different ways. This is because there are a number of factors that need to be considered, such as personality, life experiences, genetics, the type of relationship shared with the deceased, support from family and friends and previous losses, just to name a few.

Let people know how you feel

They may be relieved for the guidance. Remember, friends and family will be grieving your loved one in their own way and may not know how to respond to your grief. People usually say and do inappropriate things (sometimes even with good intentions) when you do not communicate your needs at this time.

You do not have to do it all ...if at all

Regardless of whether you were the main chef and Family Christmas Event Organizer or only ever took a salad to Aunt Flo's, you do not have to do any of it. Let someone else do the work, or at least help.

Create a new tradition

The death of a loved one may impact on your sense of self, impelling you to adopt a new way of 'being' in the world. Friends and family may want you to 'be your old self' again, but you may need to express yourself differently now. Your loved one may no longer have a physical presence, but you may feel that they are still very much a part of your family. You can create new traditions that will encompass the memory of your loved one for Christmas - and anytime.

You can change your mind

Go ahead and arrange to participate in festivities, but see how you feel on the day. Allow yourself to pull out at the last moment if you don't feel up to it; people will understand if you forewarn them (and therefore not take it personally). Often, it is the lead up to the day that is harder to cope with than the day itself. See how you go.

Do what feels right for you

You may want to withdraw from all Christmas and holiday activities this year. It's OK. 'Taking a year off' to be on your own may be just what you need to begin integrating the loss of your loved one into your life. Alternatively, you may want to carry on with your family traditions with a focus on your loved one. Let your family and friends know your decision.

You are not going crazy

The barrage of emotions that engulf you after the loss of a loved one can heighten in intensity on any special occasion. Having fun can sometimes seem wrong, almost as if you are betraying your lost loved one. This is normal and sometimes, the day after you have enjoyed yourself, you may find yourself feeling very low. Don't let that stop you having some fun.

CONTENTS :

Suggestions for managing grief	2
Be honest about how you feel	2
Children and grief	3
Adult children	3
If you are going to be on your own	4
Useful contact numbers	4
Karuna contact details	4



Letting people know how you feel...

Talk. And then talk some more. It is common for family and friends to fear losing you to grief. For children in particular, your grief may feel like a form of abandonment. Instinctively, people need you to be the person that they have always known, have always been able to predict and have always been able to rely on. This sense of knowing creates a sense of security. It may be this that motivates people to insist that you do what you have always done at Christmas, enjoy how you have always enjoyed and have the same energy levels that you have always had.

If it feels right for you, be honest and reassuring to your loved ones and friends

Let them know how deeply the loss has affected you and that you are dealing with an array of intense emotions and you are not sure how they will affect you and when. Tell them that you will do what feels right for you day to day...and then that will probably change too. Reassure them that you are journeying through a natural grieving process and that you need to alter how you operate in the world because your life as you knew it has changed. Let them know that your love for them is unwavering. Any non-acceptance of invitations is not personal - you just need time to adjust.



Practical suggestions for managing grief

It is possible to feel isolated and alone even when you are surrounded by people. Grief is a very intimate and private experience. If you can, surround yourself with people who will allow you to talk and talk when you need to and who will also sit with you in silence. Instinctively, people will try to 'fix it for you'. You may be able to reassure them that all they have to do is listen, to be there, or to let you be alone when you need to. Practical help can also be an enormous help and relief.

- Allow yourself to feel all of your emotions. There is no need 'to perform' and be happy. Feel sad, angry, happy, tired, elated: feel them all one after the other or not at all. Laugh, cry, be silent...all in the one day (or 5 minutes!)
- Write a letter to your loved one telling them how much you miss them, find a quiet spot to remember all the good times, journal your feelings, talk the ears off a friend!
- Go for a walk, go to the beach, listen to music, have a massage
- Ask friends and members of the family to write down a fond memory or a trait of your loved one and place it in a stocking. As you pull out each slip of paper, ask the person whose name is on the slip to share their memory of your loved one.
- Light a candle for your loved one. If you like, set a place at the table for them and raise your glass in honour of their memory.
- Make a memory box: place items that belonged to your loved one or symbols that represent their life in a container to keep.

Christmas Tree

Will you leave it the same or change it? Maybe you could add a special memorial ornament every year.

Where will you have dinner?

It may be important for you to continue tradition or you may like to create a new tradition and celebrate at a place that was special to you and your loved one. Do what feels right.

Christmas Cards

To send or not to send? They can maintain a link between family and friends but if it is just too exhausting to do, leave it for a year.

Parties

Go if you want, even for a short time. Let the host know you may need to go early.

Above all: look after yourself. Eat well, exercise, take time out and rest when you need to. Follow your instincts.

Children may need to continue with a routine and to know that it is OK to enjoy life in between the sad times

If young children are part of your life, you may feel overwhelmed with the thought of preparing for Christmas. Children have the ability to grieve intensely one moment and be happy the next. It is important that children maintain a routine even if it is slightly changed. A routine is a source of security for the child and lets them know that they will continue to be cared for and loved. It provides stability in an uncertain time. You may like to call on family and friends for support at this time. Practical things like shopping for food and gifts, help with decorating the house and tree, babysitting whilst you do the gift shopping or helping with housework and other domestic chores may lessen the burden of the sometimes hectic lead up to Christmas.

The extra help may leave you with some energy to just enjoy being with the children.

Above all, children need simple and honest communication

Whatever you decide to do this Christmas it may be a good idea to let the children know what is going to happen in advance. They also need to know that what has been planned may even change at the last moment. Children are very sensitive to their environment and the moods of others. Depending on their age they don't necessarily need an elaborate explanation for every question. As long as you remain open and honest with them, children may more easily adjust to their new environment. Allow them to see you upset and give a brief reason why you are upset (children have a tendency to blame themselves for things). If they see you openly mourn it may give them permission to mourn too.

Adult Children

Even adult children may still feel some of the insecurities of younger children in their time of grief. They may not know how to relate to you at this time and may be looking to you for guidance.

Communication is the key ... verbal or non-verbal

It may be easy for some families to communicate openly with each other by talking things through. Other families may have less verbal communication but are able to express their needs and support each other in non-verbal ways such as doing certain tasks, organizing affairs or being the family mediator.

Things that may be useful to remember when relating to adult children:

- Remember that they *are* adults
- Remember that they are hurting for your loved one too
- It may be your instinct to protect them from your grief, but they are old enough now to support you at this time
- Be honest about how you feel and they may be honest in return
- They may try to protect you from their grief so as not to burden you
- Let them know about new plans if you wish, but remember that it is you that needs to live your new life your way
- Sharing each other's grief may be a way of getting to know each other better

Sometimes, doing a task together such as fishing, walking, cooking, working on a car or similar can naturally open up conversations that may not necessarily happen when everyone is doing their own thing.

**The Internet
as a valuable
grief resource**

www.grlef.org.au

**Australian Centre
for Grief and
Bereavement
website.
Download
information**

If family and friends are unable to be with you this Christmas...

If you know that you will be alone this Christmas, try making a list of the things that you would like to do on the day. You may not get around to doing any of the things on the list, but at least you were prepared. You have the chance to make Christmas a beautiful tribute to your loved one in a very special way. Only you will know how to make that happen, but here are a few suggestions:

KARUNA

27 Cartwright Street
WINDSOR QLD 4030

Phone: (07) 3632 8300

Email:
karuna@karuna.org.au

Website:
www.karuna.org.au/care

- Make a special memorial spot in the garden where you can sit and 'be' with your loved one
- Plant their favourite tree or flowers
- Make a memory box with special items that belonged to your loved one or that meant something special to them. You may like to bring it out every Christmas hereafter as a memorial and perhaps add to it
- Write a letter to your loved one that can be placed in the memory box
- Visit a local spot that you both enjoyed together
- Visit somewhere that you had both wanted to see together but couldn't
- Visit your local Community Centre or Church to see if they are looking for people to visit others who will be alone at Christmas too
- Maybe you would like to volunteer for a couple of hours in a charity kitchen
- Buy or prepare yourself a lovely meal, hire some DVDs and curl up on the sofa



karuna
Kindness Compassion Courage