

# 4 WAYS

## *to make the holidays easier*

### 1. Explore something new.

We often feel bound to holiday traditions. Aunt Margaret always brings the creamed corn to Thanksgiving. Dad always cuts down the Christmas tree. The family always attends the church Christmas Eve candlelight service. However, traditions are only useful and helpful as they serve us. We need not live in service to them.

If you find that doing the same things you've always done brings deep pain, explore something new this season. Plan a unique Thanksgiving menu, buy a fake tree, take a trip instead of staying home. Making new holiday plans isn't a form of running away from your grief. It can be a way to creatively engage it. Often our holiday traditions are very past-focused. By exploring something new this season, you can allow yourself to live in this present moment.

### 2. Hold your plans loosely.

You may have felt excited to accept the invitation to the holiday party, only to get cold feet as the night approaches. That's totally okay. As you make plans for the season, hold your plans loosely. Accept invitations from friends and family who will understand if you need to back out. Offer tentative commitments instead of a hard and fast yes or no.

When you hold holiday plans loosely, you offer yourself important grief margin. If a grief wave coincides with the office party, you can back out and stay home. If the Thanksgiving meal feels overwhelming when the day arrives, you can just show up for dessert and football.

### 3. Allow space for grief.

The stretch of November and December can feel like an onslaught of saccharine pumpkin spice and mistletoe cheerfulness. In a normal year, it can be hard to find a moment of quiet and rest. In a year of grief, the carols on endless loop can almost drive you crazy. This year, as you plan your season, allow space for grief.

Whether you need to cry before you show up at Thanksgiving dinner or just retreat to the bathroom for a little quiet in the midst of opening gifts with your family, find moments to express and hold space for the hard emotions the season conjures up. You don't need to hold in your tears at the table or apologize for not feeling Santa Claus jolly. Grief is the companion that comes everywhere with you, even to holiday gatherings. You'll find you feel healthier as you're able to acknowledge her presence instead of attempt to push it away.

### 4. Celebrate what feels good.

You remember when the holiday season was a joyful one. While you can't rewind and replay the past, you can celebrate what brings you joy now. Even in grief, joy persists, so make a point to look for it. Keep a gratitude journal through November. Celebrate little things like gingerbread men and the smell of fresh pine. Spend a few moments longer in that Christmas morning hug. If grief teaches us anything, it is that life is precious. Celebrate life where you find it this season; it is still there, even amidst the sorrow.



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