



RESTORED

The Holiday Grief
Survival Guide

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HOLIDAY

Survival Guide

Traditions are passed from generation to generation and celebrated each year in ways that are comforting and familiar. We often anticipate these traditions long before they arrive, with the expectation of a joyful time with family and friends.

Grandpa continues to cut the turkey just that same way. The cousins sit at the kids table arguing over the rules of a new game. The children run through the halls shooting each other with nerf guns, while all the aunts try to get every food item on the table while still hot and at the same exact moment. Uncle George, once again, finds that coin behind the ear of little Hellen. And of course, dad brings that same old fruit cake out in hopes that someone will enjoy it with him instead of pie. Laughter, games, food, and conversation fill the room.

Each year our hearts are filled with enough fun to get us through to the next holiday season when we again enjoy our loved ones. But what will it be like now?

This year is marked by the empty chair at the dinner table and the longing to be reunited with the one we lost aches within our souls. The first year without mom forces everyone to wonder, do we just continue with our normal holiday tradition and pretend nothing has changed? Who will cook the turkey and make the orange jello salad? Who will host the dinner and help me know just the right thing to wear? Who will take the guests coats and get grandma her drink? Will Uncle George still find coins in ears and dad still think everyone loves fruitcake? We all approach the holiday season this year with dread instead of anticipation and an empty chair instead of joyful conversation. Living with losses can be especially difficult during the holiday season. A mixture of new and old traditions find a place in our hearts again, but in the meantime here are some suggestions that can make this holiday season a little easier.

HOLIDAY

Survival Tips

TIP 1: PREPARE

Holidays make us face the reality that we have an empty place at our table and in our hearts. Sometimes just acknowledging this helps ease the heartache.

TIP 2: HONOR

Recognizing this empty chair lends itself to a better day than acting like nothing is different this year. Light a candle in their honor, create a mantle or centerpiece in their honor, make their favorite dish, or find a way to remember them today.

TIP 3: TAKE CARE

During the holidays especially, be kind to yourself. Feel free to accept invitations if you feel up to it, but don't feel pressured to go if right before the event it feels like too much.

TIP 4: TRADITIONS

All your old traditions may be too difficult to participate in this year. Consider trying out a few new traditions and keep some of your favorite old ones, but only if they bring a glimpse of joy to you.

TIP 5: GET SUPPORT

Tasks may feel very burdensome especially during the holiday season. Ask others for help. Some help may be needed with shopping, cooking, cleaning, decorating or even help with certain traditions like baking special cookies.

TIP 6: CONSIDER SKIPPING IT

Many survivors decide to take a trip during the holidays to find reprieve. Let friends and family members know what you have decided to do for the holidays so they can honor your wishes.

HOLIDAY

Survival Ideas

- Keep presents to a minimum. Try shopping online this year to avoid crowds.
- Remember that others will say “Merry Christmas! Happy New Year! And Happy Thanksgiving!” These are normal greetings and are not meant to hurt you, although it may not feel merry or happy to you.
- Try out a support group in your area for extra support.
- Remember it is ok to feel joy. Try not to let guilt take hold. Your loved one would want you to enjoy yourself.
- Put encouraging statements around your house to uplift your spirit. You will find some prewritten statements below. Different statements will speak to each person so feel free to skip any you do not like or write a statement your loved one use to say to you that brought you joy.
- Let friends and family members know what you have decided to do for the holidays so they can honor your wishes. Below is an activity to help you plan ahead entitled, "Preparing for Your Holiday."
- Feel free to accept invitations, but do not feel pressured to go if right before the event it feels like too much.
- Consider attending a church service again. It may be easier to attend a service at a different church.
- Honor the memory of your loved one. Everyone in the family is grieving in their own way and time, but this will address the reality that you all miss your loved one. Consider one of the "Holiday Healing Rituals" on the next page.

HOLIDAY

Healing Rituals

- Share a story or a memory you had with your loved one.
- Light a candle in your loved one's honor and set it on the table during dinner.
- If it feels right, still set them a place at the table. Place a single flower on the table in honor of your loved one.
- Spend some time together as a family with the family album. Make it a special celebration of rejoicing over fun times together.
- Donate to a charity in honor of your loved one.
- Create a special mantle or table arrangement utilizing sentimental items that remind you of your loved one.
- Pray to the Lord and share the many ways your loved one blessed you and your family during their life.
- Hang a stocking for your loved one. Have each person write a note to say something they'd like to tell the absent person and place it in the stocking.
- Make a drink, dessert or favorite side dish in honor of your loved one.
- Consider placing some decorations on the graveside such as a small wreath, decorated tree or flowers.
- Honor your loved one's favorite tradition such as baking cookies or reading a story.
- Create a new tradition in honor of your loved one such as inviting a new guest each year to dinner.
- Hang a special ornament for the Christmas tree in remembrance of your loved one.
- Make a memorial quilt out of your loved one's old clothes, blankets or other keepsakes.
- Make a Christmas memory book as a family. Have each family member write out a memory then put those together into a keepsake book.
- Create a memory tree, hang items that remind the family members of your loved one.
- Create a memory jar and write out different ways you are thankful for having known your loved one or what gifts they left you. It can also be used to write out your cares, giving them to God.

HOLIDAY

Encouragement

Stay in the present moment.
It is my gift.

Breathe,
I will make it through!

(Insert loved one's name)
would want me to enjoy today!

"What we have once enjoyed, we
can never lose. All that we love
deeply becomes part of us."
-Helen Keller

"God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot
change;
Courage to change the things I can"
-Reinhold Niebuhr

"The best and most beautiful
things in the world cannot be seen
or even touched.
They must be felt with the heart."
-Helen Keller

"Like a bird singing in the rain, let
grateful memories survive in time
of sorrow."
-Robert Louis Stevenson

"If the future seems overwhelming,
remember that it comes one
moment at a time."
-Beth Mende Conny



PREPARING for Your Holiday

It is hard to know what would be most helpful for ourselves at any time during grief, but this is true especially during the holidays. What appeals to you this holiday season? Get out magazines or browse your favorite websites for advertisements, pictures and ideas. Cut out anything that stands out to you.

Look at the pictures you have cut out.

Set aside any collage pictures that bring even a small glimpse of joy. Make another pile of pictures that bring tears or negative feelings.

It may be best to avoid the pictures found in your bring tears or negative feelings pile. What are some holiday traditions that are too painful to participate in this year?

Look at the items you set aside that bring a glimpse of joy. Write them down. Would any of these be good activities during the holidays?

If you have set aside a picture of a dog, consider visiting a pet store, going to a dog park, or visiting a friend's dog during the holiday season. If you set aside a picture of a beach, consider taking a trip to the ocean during the holidays or having some virtual waves bring you reprieve. If you set aside a turkey, consider still having a turkey for Thanksgiving. This could be at a friend's house or buying an already cooked turkey.

Ask three friends or trusted advisors about your ideas for the holidays and receive their input to see if they feel that it would be beneficial for you.

What is one activity that will bring you a small glimpse of joy during this holiday season?

More on Navigating Loss

When many of us hear the word restored, we think of furniture or home restoration. "The same process is true when it comes to loss. Grief changes more than it ends. Though loss never disappears, it can be healed and your life can be restored. As a survivor of loss, we are like a beat-up piece of furniture that needs to be refurbished, our foundation is still the same, but our body, mind, and spirit must be renewed and restored" (RESTORED, 2020).



Picture yourself standing in front of a worn, unstable chair that needs refurbishing. How can this chair be made effective for use again? First, the chair needs a secure, stable and safe foundation. Perhaps this means bracing wobbly legs or gluing broken ones. Likewise, to navigate loss we must create a firm footing in ourselves by Reestablishing Order. Only then can we do the difficult work of accepting the reality of our loss and mourning.

Our chair's foundation is now secure, but it is full of splinters making it uncomfortable to sit in. Splinters need sanding; rough edges require some material removed creating smooth curves. Navigating loss requires us to Reset Expectations in our hearts and minds. As we encounter feelings, thoughts, and questions we must learn to confront, express and release them. Now we have a smooth surface to journey forward.






Our chair is now safe and smooth. Continued restoration requires preparing the chair for paint with a coat of primer. To navigate loss, we Remember Your Loved One by honoring them and your relationship with them through intentional acts of remembrance. Memories are the bridge between your past and your future. They put the puzzle pieces of your life back together and, like primer, seal in and protect your foundation.

The primer is set; your chair is ready to be painted. While its foundation remains the same, the paint gives the chair a new appearance that is suited to the room. Much like we give a chair a new look, loss requires us to Renew our Identity. We carry with us who we were before loss while adapting to our new reality. We practice this renewal by creating mental pictures of ourselves walking in a restored life. These pictures give us goals to strive towards – an end state to reaffirm.



It is now time to place that fully refurbished chair in your new room. A piece of furniture looks out of place if it does not appear purposeful and connect with the pieces of furniture around it. Likewise, in navigating loss we Restore Life After Loss. “From your renewed identity comes a new life. Not a wholly different life, but a restored life that connects you to your purpose and calling. This new meaning and purpose solidifies what beauty remains in you and your life after loss. Ultimately Restoring Life After Loss occurs through the reconnection with our story, God's bigger story, and the stories of others” (RESTORED, 2020).

If you are ready to reconnect and walk towards restoration, my book “RESTORED: A Self-Paced Grief Workbook for Your Journey from Loss to Life,” is a user-friendly grief workbook with practical steps for navigating the death of your loved one. Discover a step by step process to the restoration of body, mind, and spirit.



You don't have to face loss alone.

Move from loss to life with *RESTORED: Your Journey from Loss to Life*

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