

COPING WITH

GRIEF

AT SPECIAL TIMES & PLACES

What we have once enjoyed we can never lose.

All that we love deeply becomes a part of us. -Helen Keller

Losing a loved one is a difficult thing. As time passes, you may be faced with your loss over and over again. These feelings of loss and grief for your loved one may be triggered on the anniversary of their death or with other special occasions throughout the year. You may feel like holidays are no longer happy occasions, and you are left facing your grief at a time where you would normally feel excited and overjoyed. You may also feel overwhelmed when you are facing a special occasion that you once shared with your loved one.

These feelings are normal, and are sometimes called **anniversary reaction** or **reawakened grief**, and can last anywhere from days to weeks at a time. When facing these reactions, you can expect to feel - angry, anxious, sad and lonely. You may also experience -

- a lack of interest in normal activities
- trouble eating
- trouble sleeping
- stomach aches
- nightmares

Grief can also result from familiar sights, smells or sounds. Reactions from these triggers may make you feel like you are taking a step backwards in the grieving process, but by learning how to work through them, you can continue on your path to healing.



Suggestions to Help You Handle Grief

These suggestions will help you handle your grief when you face an anniversary, a trigger, or a special occasion that you once shared with your loved one.

- **Be Prepared**

Emotional reactions around certain holidays or anniversaries are common, and knowing that you are likely to experience these reactions will help you understand and control your feelings. When you have a better idea of what to expect from your emotions, you can plan ahead and work through them. You might want to let your family, friends, and relatives know your plans to work through these triggers.

While it will probably be an emotional roller coaster, planning ahead and trying to gauge how you will react will help ease you through some of the strain.

- **Plan a Distraction**

If you know that a special anniversary is coming up, or you feel like a holiday will trigger an onset of grief, try and plan a gathering, trip or visit with friends or loved ones. This will help you feel like you are not alone, and keep you busy and distracted.

Memories are important, but surrounding yourself with friends and loved ones is important for creating new memories.

- **Let Yourself Feel**

Allow yourself to experience all of your emotions. Remember that it is okay to feel loss again—just remember to allow yourself to feel happiness as well. During certain occasions, you may find that you are feeling a vast range of emotions, and may even find yourself crying and laughing sporadically. This is okay.

Do not pretend that you are not hurting.

- **Remembering**

During anniversaries, triggers, or special occasions, try to focus on the good things that you shared with your loved one and the times you spent together. [Centering](#) is a technique whereby you devote special time to focus on your beloved - the struggles and accomplishments, the joys, and the sorrows.

Keep their memory in a special way by doing things like lighting a candle for them, looking through old photographs, writing a letter, poem or story for them, or planting a tree in their honor.

- **Start New Traditions**

If you begin a new tradition, it might help you through these times of reawakened grief. It is important to remember your loved one, but it is also important to make new memories and new traditions to look forward to. Do not feel like you have to do something just because you did it every year before now. Just make sure that you do not fall into a trap of loneliness.

Try and make new traditions with friends, family, or other loved ones.

- **Help Others**

Sometimes, it is hard to imagine that others are also suffering. They have needs that you could address - visit someone who is alone and lonely or contribute to a cause or charity in memory of your loved one.

As you lift a hand to help others, you will find that you lift your grief as well.

If Grief Becomes Too Much

There is no time limit for experiencing these times of reawakened grief. However, if your emotions worsen over time and start to interfere with your daily functioning, you may need to see a grief counsellor or another mental health provider. Unresolved grief may lead to depression or other problems. With professional help you can re-establish a sense of control and direction in your life.