

Navigating Loneliness and Grief during the Holidays

Starting in the Fall, as leaves begin to change, we are reminded of a grouping of seasonal events being ushered in to our calendars and hearts every year. The holiday season can include Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day. For some, there are also birthdays and anniversaries to celebrate during those months.

This can be a time of year for gatherings with those we love and treasured traditions we look forward to all year. For many, however, it can be a time of sadness and loneliness, particularly when grieving the loss of a loved one. Facing these special days without that person can seem overwhelming and requires multiple strategies for coping during this time.

Why are holidays so difficult?

If you are facing this holiday season while grieving the loss of a loved one, it can seem unimaginable to find much of anything that is joyful. We have early reminders all around us in retail stores, cafes, advertising and community events, filling grievers with a sense of dread. It can be difficult to give ourselves permission to feel happiness, when we are missing someone, as if it were a betrayal - how can I be happy when this person is not here?

Even when not facing loss through the death of a loved one, there are many who find this time of year difficult. Other losses such as lack of employment, loss of a relationship or family, instability, painful family dynamics and disappointments can also sting more so during this time of year. Images of celebrations, happy couples, and families can highlight the sense of loneliness and isolation.

What can we do to navigate these challenges?

- ***Be kind and compassionate to ourselves.*** By giving ourselves permission in accepting or declining invitations. Finding gratitude for small things can help in managing unrealistic expectations.
- ***Take care of your physical, mental and emotional health.*** Adequate sleep, healthy nutrition and simple physical activity such as walking can enhance your ability to cope. For grief related sadness, connect with [grief support groups](#) at Partners In Care. If you have had struggles with depression and want help, talk to your primary care doctor about recommendations, including behavioral health resources such as [Deschutes County Behavioral Health](#).

- ***Incorporating mindfulness practices such as breathing exercises and meditation.*** *Partners In Care* offers an eight-week class in *Mindfulness for Well-Being* for learning ways of managing reactions to stress. Phone apps such as Calm, Head Space and Insight Timer are also useful.
- ***Communicate ahead of time with others around you for what you need.*** This allows for coordination with other schedules and lets your supports know how to help you.
- ***Traveling during the holiday or changing up locations.*** Many bereaved have found it useful to make a change or adaptation to usual traditions. These changes can provide a much-needed respite for this year, and sometimes the change is so appreciated it even becomes part of a new tradition going forward.
- ***Be a part of something bigger than yourself- such as volunteering.*** Giving back to others is helpful to our own healing. It can also be a way to honor a loved one by volunteering in their memory. For ideas of agencies, check out [Central Oregon Gives](#) for suggestions of non-profit agencies in Central Oregon who could use your help.