



## 9 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays



'Tis the season for mixed feelings! While it's hard to imagine celebrating when your heart is aching from loss, it is possible to make the holidays brighter this year. Just follow these helpful tips.

Be gentle with yourself. There's an old saying that offers tremendous wisdom: "Feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just are." Your emotional responses are both unique to you and universal among all who mourn. Accept them as guidelines for how you should care for yourself through the healing process, without judgment and with tenderness.

Understand that grief is emotionally and physically exhausting. Your ability to cope with your loss can be undermined when you're too tired or overwhelmed by holiday obligations. Nap before parties or events. If you can't sleep at night, talk to your doctor about a short-term sleep aid. This also means that you're free to rethink how much you're able to do. Is it too sad to attend services or put up a tree? It's ok to take a break this year.

Tell others what you need. Don't assume that your family and friends can read your mind. Let them know what you can do this holiday, what will help you and what you'd prefer to avoid. Be sure to be clear, but kind, to minimize the risk of hurt feelings. Not up to talking? Send an email or ask someone to share your message with others on your behalf.

Look for balance. Being alone with your memories can be greatly restorative. Too many hours on your own, however, can leave you feeling even more isolated. So experiment with striking the right balance between time to yourself and time with others. Tell yourself it's OK to say no and, conversely, to say yes.

Talk about your loved one. Many people won't bring up his or her name for fear of causing you pain. When you share memories, even if you choke up a bit, you make it easier for everyone else to do the same. Take out photo albums for visitors to thumb through. Propose a toast at a family dinner. You'll find comfort in grieving together.

Volunteer. Focusing on helping others is always a good option, especially if you find healing in giving back. Check with your church, library or local volunteer center for ideas.

Have an exit strategy. Waves of grief can strike unexpectedly, and having a plan for gracefully leaving parties or events can help you reduce your anxiety about attending. If possible, drive your own car or have a phone number ready so you can call a cab. Practice what you might say to the host so you can be comfortable leaving according to your own timetable.

Celebrate a favorite ritual or start a new one. Maybe you and your loved one always went to a performance of The Messiah or threw a party for the neighbors the week before Christmas. It's up to you whether you want to continue doing this now that he or she is gone. Perhaps you can start a new tradition in your loved one's memory. Make a donation in his or her name. Buy a new candle and light it every evening. Bake dozens of his favorite cookies and box them up as gifts.

Talk with people who understand what you're going through. Hospice Alliance is hosting two events this winter to support you in your grief:

[Hospice Alliance Social Group Luncheon](#), December 21: from 12:00 – 1:30 pm

The Social Group, an informal gathering of bereaved friends and family, will meet for a buffet lunch at Casa Capri, 2129 Birch Road, Kenosha, WI.

Please call Mary at 262-652-4482, ext. 1294, for reservations by December 18.

[Hospice Alliance Winter 6-Week Grief Support Group](#), Jan.15-Feb.19, 2015

Meets weekly from 10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Meetings are held at Hospice Alliance, 10220 Prairie Ridge Blvd., Pleasant Prairie.

Please call Mary at 262-652-4482, ext. 1294, for more information and registration. Group size is limited.

## **Understanding Senior Living Options**



When the time comes to think about a new living situation for your older relative or friend, the choices can seem overwhelming. So much depends on evaluating their current needs and anticipating what the future may hold.

How do you make the right decision? As part of your research, it's important to understand the different options. Here's an overview of what the most common options provide:

### **Independent Living**

Other names you may hear: senior independent living communities, retirement communities, congregate care, retirement villages, senior apartments.

*What it is:* These are housing arrangements for older adults with few medical problems, who want to live in a community with activities, amenities and services tailored for active senior citizens. Most do not offer medical care or have nurses on staff. In-home help can be hired on an individual basis.

### **Assisted Living Facility (ALF)**

Other names you may hear: residential care home, personal care home

*What it is:* On the senior housing spectrum, ALFs fall somewhere between independent living and a skilled nursing facility. Residents are primarily capable of functioning on their own, but may need some help with daily living activities. Older adults live in their own apartments or in a dormitory or hotel-style setting. Meal plans are available, along with recreational activities and common areas for socializing, exercise and entertaining. The wide variety of options accommodates an equally wide variety of needs, budgets and interests. Some ALFs may feature dedicated wings or programs for residents with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

### **Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC)**

Other names you may hear: retirement communities, retirement homes or senior housing

*What it is:* CCRCs provide all options along a continuum of care, from independent living through skilled nursing, within a single complex. Because older adults can move seamlessly among the living settings as their needs shift and evolve, their stress level may be greatly reduced. Typically CCRCs require a large payment, called an entry fee, before a resident can move in. There are also monthly fees.

### **Long-Term Care Facility (LTCF)**

Other names you may hear: nursing home, skilled nursing facilities

*What it is:* Designed for seniors who have complex medical needs (including illness, recovery from surgery, disability and rehabilitation), LTCFs are staffed with registered nurses who coordinate care and medication regimens. A new trend among LTCFs is to feature dedicated wings for residents with middle-to-late stage Alzheimer's disease or other dementias. New concepts in senior living are continually being explored. It important to know that when your elderly loved one needs palliative or hospice care, Hospice Alliance's services are available at all types of housing.

### **Shop & Support Hospice Alliance this Season**



It's so easy and convenient to raise money for Hospice Alliance while doing your holiday shopping. Here's how:

[Shop online at Amazon, any time](#)

With a few easy clicks, Hospice Alliance will receive 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases at no additional cost to you. [AmazonSmile](#) offers the same products, same prices and the same service that you've come to expect from Amazon, but lets you support us at the same time.

Best of all, you can shop [AmazonSmile](#) year-round to raise money for Hospice Alliance's patient care, education and grief support services.

Because of your generosity, we're able to care for all patients and their families facing end of life, regardless of their ability to pay. Thank you for your support, and happy holidays!