

Grief Survival Kit Can Get You Through the Holidays

Submitted by [Harriet Hodgson](#) |

Eight years have passed since my daughter died. Helen was born on Thanksgiving Day, so this holiday is painful for me. Christmas is painful too because it was Helen's favorite holiday. Three other family members died the same year and I miss them all. To keep myself from sliding backward on the recovery path, I assemble a Grief Survival Kit. Here are the components.

Special plans. My husband is disabled and I'm his primary caregiver. Going anywhere takes effort and I have to consider lead-time, weather, and wheelchair van parking. I'm going to drive my husband around the city to look at holiday lights. We're also going to a concert and watching holiday choirs on television.

People who understand. Each year, we take turns preparing holiday dinner. My sister-in-law is cooking Thanksgiving dinner and I'm cooking Christmas dinner. We are fortunate to have a supportive family and, although we don't see them often, we feel their love.

Meaningful talk. Having a trusted family member or friend to talk to helps me survive the holidays. My talk can be verbal or via email. Letting my feelings out and talking them out has helped me greatly.

Social contacts. My husband is a retired physician and we get together with other retirees once a month. We also see friends at church and the health club. Short as these contacts may be, they make us feel less alone.

Chosen memories. Holidays can dredge up guilt and "what if" feelings and both are non-productive. I choose to focus on happy memories. I remember the cookies and sugar-free apple pies my daughter baked. Most of all, I remember her laughter.

Linking objects. During the holidays I make special effort to use things that connect me with departed ones. Although I haven't made out the Christmas dinner yet, I'll probably use my deceased daughter's hand blender. Using it links me with her.

Giving to others. In memory of our deceased loved ones, we donate to various organizations—the local food bank, public library, Salvation Army, and our church. Our gifts are usually monetary, but we also give thoughtful deeds, or books I've written. I also write articles for free.

Journaling. Many grief experts tout the benefits of journaling. I don't keep a separate journal because the books and articles I write act as journals. Expressing feelings with words has helped me understand myself and my grief journey.

Walking. Research findings suggest that physical activity helps to dispel dark feelings and depression. We don't want to slip into holiday depression, so we go to the health club. While my husband uses a special bike I walk on a treadmill or around the track.

Don't let the holidays get you down. Assemble your Grief Survival Kit now. Start with the things on my list and build on it. Be kind to yourself and focus on love, for it really is stronger than death.