

# Coping with significant events

Managing birthdays, holidays  
and other special days...



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Caring at the heart of our community

Often people find that grief can intensify in the days leading up to and during events such as Christmas, New Year, Mother's or Father's day, birthdays, or special anniversaries, and over time these milestones can continue to be challenging.

Grief is an individual experience. There are no rules for how to cope with holidays or anniversaries, but we hope the following ideas will help you to plan how to manage these potentially difficult times.

### **Hope for the best, plan for the worst - be prepared**

- Anticipating and planning is helpful, though keep in mind that thinking about a significant day may be quite stressful.
- Consider your options carefully and if possible share your ideas with family and friends who may help you to develop a working plan. Recognise that you may need to be flexible and change plans.

### **Be kind to yourself**

- Grief can be exhausting and events particularly so. Pace yourself, try to get enough sleep, relaxation and exercise.
- It can be helpful to limit your use of alcohol and stimulants, such as coffee, as these may increase feelings of anxiety.
- Take periods of 'time out' to be quiet and restful.
- Give yourself permission to set realistic expectations about your energy levels. For example, many bereaved people choose not to send cards or put up decorations for their first Christmas.
- If you are anxious about being out in busy streets in the lead up to Christmas, consider shopping online. Ordering items ahead of schedule can help to lower stress.





## Share your grief

- It can help to share your grief with people you trust and love.
- Ask for help from family and friends. Remember that some people welcome being told how they can help you.
- Try to do activities with family or friends to mark special days. These may be existing traditions or new activities in memory of your loved one. These will help you feel closer to the person who has died, and closer to your family or friends as you remember and share together.
- Visiting a special place or sharing photographs and memories can be helpful. Talking about your special person can give other people permission to share their stories, which may help both them and you.
- Be mindful that other people cope with their loss in different ways – some want to talk about what has happened, others will want to distract themselves and avoid open expressions of grief.

## Do what is right for you; it's OK

- To say 'no' as well as 'yes' sometimes.
- To laugh as well as cry.
- To dread the forthcoming holiday or event.
- To want to be private and solitary at times and socially active at others.
- To scale back on planned gatherings to make them manageable.
- To let others share the workload and decision making.
- To decide to suspend the usual traditions and celebrations and do things a little differently this time around.



## Honour the person who died

- Light a candle in their memory.
- Play favourite music or watch a favourite film.
- Eat a meal you loved to eat together.
- Make a memory box, perhaps with members of your family.
- Write a letter to your loved one to keep and read again in the future.
- Look through photo albums.
- Wear a special item of clothing, jewellery, or perfume or aftershave that connects you with the person who has died.
- Donate money or a gift to a charity in your loved one's name.

## How to contact our bereavement service

**Telephone:** 01865 225878 (Mon-Fri 9:00am - 4:30pm)

**Email:** [pallcarebereavement@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:pallcarebereavement@ouh.nhs.uk)

**[sobellhouse.org](http://sobellhouse.org)**

