

8 RULES FOR SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

*The holidays are often a very difficult time for bereaved families.
Here are eight helpful rules to guide you in “surviving” them.*

- 1. Do it your way.** For some grievors, keeping old traditions brings comfort; for others, doing things “as usual” is painful. We’re all different, and what works for you may not work for someone else. So, be true to yourself.
- 2. Rules are meant to be bent or broken.** Others in your life may try to “guilt” you into participating in an event or custom that you’ve always been a part of. While it may be important to them that you not break tradition, let them know that it’ll take time for you to resolve what traditions you can keep, alter, or do away with, and that old rules *don’t* apply to new grief.
- 3. Pencils work better than pens.** Anticipation of holidays and special events can often be more stressful than the events themselves. When considering accepting an invitation to a holiday event, ask the host to “pencil” you in and let them know that your participation will depend on how well you feel on the day of the event. If you’re pressed to give a definitive answer, trust your instincts when choosing to say yes or no. Pencils are best; just make sure you have an eraser close at hand.
- 4. “Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone.”** Many people will try to cheer you up and try to find a silver lining to your grief. Expect cheesy clichés and well-intentioned, bad advice from others who see your grief and tears as rain on their holiday parade. Once again, be true to yourself, because masks are for Halloween and Halloween has passed.
- 5. Let people know you aren’t “expecting”.** Expectations begin with you, so try to avoid placing big ones on how well you’ll handle the holidays, or how much you’ll be able to participate in them. On the other hand, don’t overestimate how difficult it may be. Grief during the holidays can fluctuate wildly—you’ll have some good days, when you feel like you can function, and some bad days, when the pain feels unbearable. Expect the unexpected.
- 6. It’s my “pity” and I’ll cry if I want to.** Tears are our tribute to our beautiful loved ones and nothing is more healing, or makes us feel closer to them, than when we cry. The holiday season will surely touch every emotion, and flood you with memories of happy times. Throw yourself a pity party whenever you feel like it—a time to just sit with your memories and cry if you want to.
- 7. Take care of yourself.** When in doubt, choose to nurture yourself and be kind to you. Take ample time to do what you enjoy or what brings you peace. If it’s exercise, reading, meditation, shopping or simply sitting alone with your thoughts. The holiday season is the most stressful time of year for most grieving people; take extra care of *yourself* and *your* needs.
- 8. Giving is the gift that keeps on giving.** Healing begins when we help others. Many grievors find that reaching out and helping the lonely and those less fortunate can be a great source of comfort during this season. Some will buy gifts for strangers or fulfill a needy child’s Christmas wish list. We know from experience that serving others during the holidays gives us more healing than anything else we’ve ever tried. So, if you’re up to it, start new traditions of volunteerism or helping to make somebody else’s holiday a little brighter. It just might lighten your load and brighten your holidays, just a little bit.

Written by: Alan and Denise Pedersen