

WHAT ABOUT SPECIAL DAYS?

GRIEF AND HOLIDAYS

Grief can make certain days feel complex and difficult to navigate. There are a few kinds of days that may feel different after a death:

- Recognized holidays, like Christmas, Mother's or Father's day, or other days that often involve family gatherings or recognition of special people
- Anniversaries, including days that were important to your person, such as their birthday or the day that they died
- Milestones and important days, including days that you might be more aware of your person's absence than usual, such as your own birthday, date of your person's diagnosis or other big event, or days when important things happen in your life now

No matter what kind of day highlights that your person is not here with you, it can help to make a plan for how you hope to handle the day. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Acknowledge that it won't be the same**, no matter what you do, things will still feel different.
- **People in the same family probably grieve differently** and family members may want to treat the same day differently. That's okay. You might need to make several plans, or have some family members involved in parts of the plans and not others.
- **You might feel a variety of emotions besides missing your person.** Like other parts of grief, your feelings might change fast, feel unexpected, or not match others. For example, you might have happy memories, feel relieved that you are able to do things differently, or feel numb. You can't control how important days hit you, and you don't have to try.
- **What you do the first year doesn't have to be what you do every year.** Some people find traditions and ways to remember their person right away, but many don't. Try not to put a lot of pressure on the first holidays – you might need to get through these ones, and make an ongoing plan next year, or try something and adjust it in the future.
- **Respect limits and ask for help.** You may not have the emotional or physical energy to do everything everyone wants to do. That's okay. It may help to ask other family members or friends to help if some people want to do things that others don't.
- **Many people feel worse before important days than they do on the day itself.** Your body remembers what happened, and thinking about it may be worse than living through it. It's okay if the day is hard, and it's okay if it isn't as hard as you thought.



As a family, you can think and talk about how you want to handle special days. It might help to go through the calendar together and identify which days feel important.

Some people find comfort in doing special things on days that matter to them or to their person. Others want to go through the day as normally as possible.

Here are some ideas as you think about what you and your family want to do.

- **Things for yourself** – be gentle with yourself. Don't stress about getting too much done or getting the day exactly right. Think about what could make your body feel calmer, what you want to do with your energy, and who you want to be around who could support you well
- **Things to remember your person** – what did they like to do, eat, watch, etc? What did you like to do together? You might want to do some of these things, either on your own or with someone close to you. You may choose to go somewhere special, such as the place where they are buried or interred, a place your person liked, or somewhere you went together. You could light a candle in their memory, create a paper chain with memories of your person, or find or create a special decoration that reminds you of them
- **Things to connect with or help others** – do you want to do anything in honor of your person? Consider doing acts of kindness in their memory, participating in things connected with them or what happened to them (such as remembrance walks), giving money or volunteering with a cause they cared about, or spending time with others who have experienced similar things.
- **Things to connect with faith** – we see God calling people to remember important things in the Bible. Can you remember ways God has been present with you in your grief, or ways He was faithful to your person? Consider making a physical way to remember these things.