



# Ellie's Way

## Holiday Healing Guide

### Mourning, Remembering and Healing During the Holidays

Chelsea Hanson

## **Surviving the Holidays**

We think about you always,  
we talk about you still,  
you have never been forgotten,  
and you never will.

~Author Unknown

Milestone dates are an intense, emotion-filled experiences that can trigger acute grief. During the first year without your loved one and years to come, certain times, such as the holidays, can elicit the same intense pain as when the death occurred. This does not mean you are going backward in your healing, but that you are experiencing an intense burst of grief. Rest assured, you're not losing the progress you've made; instead, you're oscillating between grieving and healing while gradually integrating loss into your life.

Milestones can include any date that is significant, such as the holidays, anniversary of death, birthdays, Mother's Day or Father's Day.

With the holidays coming, below are some ways to honor your loved one and prepare for these special days with self-care. These tips can also be used at any important milestone date or when you have grief bursts.

Remember, you know what is best for you. Listen to your heart and inner knowing about how to handle the holidays and milestone dates in a way that works for you. You are the expert on your grief experience.

Knowing healing is possible,

Chelsea

Chelsea Hanson, Author & Grief Healing Expert

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Join the Ellie's Way Grief Support Group at [www.facebook.com/groups/elliesway](https://www.facebook.com/groups/elliesway)



*Don't just be good to others.  
Be good to yourself too.*

*~ Unknown*



## Caring for Your “Self”

The grief you are experiencing now is something you likely have never encountered and can intensify during the holidays. This is foreign territory and you'll need support to help you successfully navigate this new terrain. A support system that understands your unique emotional needs is essential for renewal and restoration, especially during this time of year.

Building a support system may be new to you. This guide will help you cultivate ways to honor, support and renew yourself as you begin to rebuild your life and cope.

Let family and friends know your grief healing is a priority. This means educating others on how they can help you to adjust, accept and absorb this major change in your life. This means letting them know how they can help you cope with the holidays. Ignore any judgmental responses or inaccurate interpretations of *your* experience. Take the opportunity to educate others on what *you* need to heal. Others will need your direction and guidance to support you.

In addition to the help of others, you can provide a support system for yourself through self-care. To care for yourself means to serve as advocate for your healing and renewal. What you want and need matters exploring the unfamiliar world of grief and coping with the holidays.

Self-care means providing loving acts of kindness to yourself even when you don't feel like it or think it is foolish. Self-care means taking care of your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health with deliberate action. Self-care means to renew yourself by knowing and fulfilling your needs. When you take care of yourself first, then you will have more capacity to take care of others.

To combat the pressure you may feel to appear better, both from yourself and from others, ask yourself what you really want. Listen closely to the answers. You do have a choice in how you react and what you do at any time and during the holidays. It's your choice how you would like to celebrate or not celebrate the holidays this year and every year. Trust your internal guidance system to honor what is best for *you*, not others.

How can you begin to take good care of yourself with the holidays coming?



*Joy shared is doubled,  
and grief shared is halved.*

*~ Native American Expression*



## **Reaching Out for Help**

Now that you are beginning to understand the importance of caring for yourself, consider how you can begin to accept support from others. Unfortunately, you may be so depleted with the holidays coming that it can feel impossible to ask for assistance. You may be afraid to lean on others if you haven't in the past and may be uncomfortable accepting help now.

Many people think they must control their mourning to be strong for others. You may have learned to keep your needs to yourself. You may think that it's gracious to thwart others' requests to provide love, compassion or support.

But that is not helpful for your recovery, especially during the holidays. Everyone, including you, needs a chance to grieve and mourn loss. Those who care about you and understand grief won't think less of you for showing your emotions.

Others may want you to feel better and tell you how good you are doing. To appease them, you may try to act and look normal, but inside you know the truth. Being strong and hiding



your grief only makes it harder on you. To get out of pain, you must go through it. Covering up sorrow does not work, especially when you need help to cope with the holidays.

Let's reframe this mode of "I can do it alone" thinking. Instead, consider:

It's good to be taken care of by compassionate, nurturing people who want to support you. It's okay to receive help... and lots of it. It's safe to take advantage of the comfort offered, especially during the holidays.

Tell others the truth about how you are feeling and your apprehension about the upcoming time of year.

Allow people to tend to your well-being, although it may seem uncomfortable. Permit others to serve you now, just as you would help them in their time of need. Ask for support, especially during this time of year.

How can you reach out for help?

A man with a beard, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and blue plaid pajama pants, is sitting on a dark leather sofa. He is holding an open book and looking down at it. The sofa is positioned in front of a large window with a wooden frame. To the right of the man is a decorated Christmas tree with red, blue, and gold ornaments and lights. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window and the Christmas tree lights. The text "He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it." is overlaid on the top left of the image in a white, cursive font. Below it, in a smaller white font, is "~ Turkish Proverb". In the bottom left corner, there is a logo for "Ellie's Way" featuring a stylized flower with a heart in the center.

He that conceals his grief  
finds no remedy for it.

~ Turkish Proverb

## **Asking For Specific Help**

Others want to help, but they often aren't sure what to do. Help them help you. They will respond with guidance or direct requests from you when you're specific. Remember, many people have not experienced the death of someone they care about, so they don't naturally know how to assist you.

Close your eyes for a moment, and ask, "What do I need at this moment?" Do I want emotional care, financial support, or household help? Do I want companionship, time away from home or a break from my job? Do I want to break past holiday traditions? Do I want to tell others I can't attend certain gatherings?

If you have difficulty composing a list of what you need, enlist a trusted confidant, friend or family member to help develop it. To get started, you might say, "People want to help me, but I am not sure where to start. Can you help me write a 'how to assist me list'?"

You are worthy and deserving of other's care. Don't go it alone; extra assistance will help you through grief, especially during the holidays. Now is the time to seek support.

What do you need most right now from others to support you during the holidays?

Now that you have identified where you need help, be sure to find the right people to assist you. *Some won't be able to encourage you because of their discomfort and uneasiness.* Many people are fearful of death or have anxiety about their own mortality or loss of family members. Most people simply haven't been taught how to talk, cope or work through grief.

*There* are others who can and will naturally comfort you. They'll want to nurture, love and cheer you on. Those who have gone through something similar will empathize with your daily challenges and acknowledge your pain. They've been there in their own way.

Now is the time to surround yourself with caring and compassionate people who can listen, encourage and guide you. Spend time with others you feel good around—those who lift your

energy or give you a shoulder to cry on. Talk to people who understand—those who listen to your honest feelings with openness.

In turn, consider limiting interactions with toxic people—those who aren't sensitive to your needs, who drain your energy and take away your personal power. If others are telling you how you should feel or not feel at the holidays, they are not the correct people to serve as grief companions.

Who are the right people to support you during the holidays?



*I have to come believe that caring  
for myself is not self-indulgent.  
Caring for myself is an act of survival.*

*~ Aure Lorde*





## **Putting Your Needs First and Expressing Preferences**

Now that you've identified the right people to talk to, it's time to ask for the necessary support and to make your needs a priority. Lean on the caring support system you have identified—the people who are both willing and able to help, honor your preferences and meet your needs with love and respect.

When you reach out to others, the burden of coping with the holidays can be lessened. Seeking help should not be considered a “crutch,” but instead an important lifeline.

If you aren't familiar with setting boundaries or limits with others, plan on giving yourself time to respond to requests for holiday activities. Rather than answering quickly, you can say, “I'll need to review my schedule,” or “I need to check with \_\_\_\_\_,” or “Let me think about it.”

Next, ask yourself, “Is this request something you’d really like to do or are you agreeing due to obligation or guilt?” It’s important to think about your needs first rather than worrying about how others may respond.

If you choose to decline the request, do so with decisiveness and honesty. You can say, “I’ll have to pass this time, but look forward to seeing you in the future,” or “I already have too many things going on for the holidays, so I can’t attend.” Remember, it’s not your responsibility to manage others’ reactions or make them feel better. Instead, gauge your success on how you feel by making the best choice for you, especially during the holidays.

How can you put your needs first?

*Speak your mind  
even if your  
voice shakes.*

*~ Maggie Huhn*



## **Being An Advocate For Your Needs and Emotions**

As you learn to express your preferences and put your wishes first, you'll be serving as an advocate for yourself. Continue to be open with your support system about your emotions and wants during the holidays.

You will experience many emotional ups and downs when grieving. Your feelings, energy and interests can change quickly and dramatically with little warning. This can be startling to both yourself and others, and you'll need to educate others on how to help you.

You'll think you are doing better, but then, out of nowhere, bursts of sorrow appear. You may wonder how you can feel good one moment and terrible the next. These grief attacks are normal and can occur whether six days, six months or six years from your loss. They don't mean you are going backward in your healing. Rest assured, you're not losing the progress you've made; instead, you're oscillating between grieving and healing while gradually moving forward.

Because you will move between acute and subtle grief, your healing process can be unpredictable and will not follow a straight line. Grief's intensity will change. Anything that reminds you of your loss can trigger a grief reaction, even seemingly minor or random things. Events, places, people, music, scents or images can trigger strong grief feelings.

Educate your personal circle about your right to experience eruptions of grief in public or private, especially during the holidays. Because others who aren't experiencing profound sorrow have an easier time predicting their feelings, they may not understand or wonder why your moods change dramatically.

Let your friends and family know surges of emotion will happen. Explain how they can support you, whether that means letting you cry, talk, rest or be alone, especially during the holidays.

What triggers your grief? How can you educate others to support you during the holidays?

## **Planning for the Holidays**

Think about how you would like to spend the day.

Would you like to spend it in quiet reflection or with others? Perhaps you would like to do something your loved one enjoyed? It is important to spend the day how you need to, not how others expect you to.

Allow yourself some time alone.

The holidays and important milestone dates may feel wrong and strange without the person you miss. You may have a hard time accepting that the person you care about is not with you like he or she was in the past. Allow yourself time alone to grieve and to not take part in any hustle and bustle that may accompany the day, if that is what you desire.

Be gentle with yourself and set realistic expectations on how you may feel during the holidays. Your most important task is to care for your emotional well-being and follow your needs.



## **Share Your Plans**

Others may not understand the significance of the holidays and certain dates without your loved one. Give them guidance on how they can help, and welcome their support.

Perhaps this year you would like to celebrate certain dates in a different way. Don't be afraid to break traditions so you can commemorate the milestones in a way that works for you. Keep your plans flexible. It's okay to leave your options open based on how you are feeling.

## **Involve Others**

Would you like others to be involved in your plans for the holidays? Perhaps you need someone to go to the cemetery with you? Perhaps you want to get together with select people to share memories? Perhaps you want a quiet visit with a few trusted friends? Lean on your support network, remembering that others want to help.

Let others know what you want to do and NOT do. You are the master of your grief experience and teacher to others.

# *Healing at the Holidays*

## *Remembrance Ideas to Help You Mourn*



## **Ideas for your consideration to help healing during the holidays:**

Donate or give a gift to a special charity in honor of your loved one?

Decorate a holiday tree with items that remind you of your beloved?

Send remembrance flowers to other family members or yourself?

Give a framed photo or photo ornament of your loved one to friends and family?

Place a wreath or holiday flowers at the cemetery?

Share special memories together over a holiday dinner?

Look at photos or videos of your loved one over the holidays?

Set a place at the holiday table for your beloved?

Give a gift to yourself from your loved one who died?

Give a card from your loved one to other family members?

Ask everyone to share a special memory of the deceased at your holiday gathering?

Place a present under the holiday tree for your beloved person?

Make a special holiday ornament in memory of the person you love who died?

Place a meaningful memento on your holiday tree in memory of the deceased?

Put a Christmas tree in your deceased child or loved one's bedroom?

Give photobooks of cherished family memories as a gift?

Send a holiday letter in your Christmas card in remembrance of your beloved person?

Would you like to place a holiday remembrance in the memorial section of the newspaper?

Break tradition and start new ways of celebrating the holidays?

Would you like to take a trip over the holidays?

Put the holiday activities on hold and resume another year?

Decline invitations for parties and gatherings this year?

Reflect upon the gifts your deceased loved one gave you and are always yours?

What feels right to you this year? Share your thoughts, wishes and desired plans for the holidays with the important people in your life so they can support you.

You know your heart. You know what is right for you.

You know who is the most capable to help you. You know the pace of recovery that is correct for you. Remember, a good support network simply stands by your side to provide encouragement, understanding and compassion for your healing during the holidays.

Give yourself PERMISSION to mourn in your own way this holiday season.

Your needs and wishes are important. Take good care of yourself.



Goodbyes are not forever.  
Goodbyes are not the end.  
They simply mean I'll miss  
you until we meet again.



## **Remembering Through Holiday Ritual**

Consider paying tribute to your loved one through a holiday remembrance ritual.

The healing ritual can be as easy as saying a prayer before Thanksgiving dinner, lighting a candle in memory of the deceased, reading a poem or releasing balloons to the heavens.

A simple ritual can aid your healing, whether it is held once a year at the holidays or even every month. The ceremony can consist of just you, a few people or many others. The purpose, however, will always be the same – to help you honor and pay respect to your loved one's life.

What your loved one means to you will be further acknowledged and honored. Plus, you will receive additional love and support from others participating in the ritual.

Using a holiday remembrance ritual will help you embrace your loss as well as reaffirm what your loved one meant to you when alive and what he or she continues to mean you.

How can you honor the person you love who died at the holidays?

Below is a poem you can read at your holiday dinner or gathering. Each participant can light a candle and then a designated person can read the poem. A moment of silence can be observed, the deceased's favorite song can be played, or meaningful music can be used in the background.

In the rising of the sun,  
And it's going down,  
We remember you.

In the blowing of the wind,  
And in the chill of winter,  
We remember you.

In the opening of buds,  
And in the warmth of summer,  
We remember you.

In the rustling of leaves,  
And in the beauty of autumn  
We remember you.

In the beginning of the year,  
And when it ends,  
We remember you.

We remember you,  
And as long as we live  
You shall live too,  
For you are a part of us as,  
We remember you.

~ Author Unknown