

A FREE GIFT FROM HARPER'S HEART PRESS



holiday grief

survival checklist

There is no right way to get through the holidays after a loss. Use what helps, skip the rest. You only have to get through today, and some days, just this hour.

before the day

- ☐ Decide what to keep, change or skip this year. All three are okay.
- ☐ Tell one person what you need from them. Most people want to help and don't know how.
- ☐ Choose a safe person to stay near at gatherings, and a signal that means "I need a minute."
- ☐ Plan a way out: your own car, a set time to leave, a quiet room.
- ☐ Lower the bar. Fewer gifts, store-bought food and a shorter day all count.
- ☐ Pick one small way to include them.

on the day

- ☐ Eat something. Drink some water.
- ☐ Take breaks. Step outside, or into a quiet room.
- ☐ Say their name, or ask someone to say it with you.
- ☐ Let the tears come if they come. Let the laughs come too. Laughing is not disloyal.
- ☐ If it hits all at once: feet flat on the floor, a few slow breaths, then one kind thing for yourself.
- ☐ Leave early if you need to. You don't owe anyone an explanation.

after

- ☐ Rest. Hard days use up a lot of energy.
- ☐ Notice what helped, and what didn't, for next time.
- ☐ Reach out to someone: a call, a text, a walk together.
- ☐ If sleep won't come, rest your body anyway. Lying still still counts.
- ☐ When the what-ifs get loud, try one even-if: even if I had done it differently, it might not have changed the ending.
- ☐ Be gentle with yourself, whether the day was harder than you hoped or easier.

If you are in crisis, call or text 988 (U.S.) or your local emergency number. This guide is a gentle companion, not professional care.

*turn the page for your plan, words for family,
why this season feels so heavy, and more*

With love, Niki
Real tears. Real love.

BEFORE THE DAY



my holiday *plan*

Traditions can be kept, changed or set down for a year. Whatever you choose this year, you can choose again next year. Many people find the days leading up are harder than the day itself, so a plan made early can help.

keep

The traditions that still feel like home.

change

Keep the heart of it, change the how.

skip

Set it down this year. It can wait.

The days I'm worried about:

My safe person is _____ and our signal is _____

One way I'll include them this year:

Light a candle for them

Hang their ornament

Make their favorite food

Give a gift in their name

Share one story at the table

Visit a place they loved

If there are kids at the table: when you remember the one you're missing, make sure the brothers and sisters feel seen too. (Dr. Heidi Horsley)

If I need to leave or take a break, I will:

Something small that might bring me comfort:

Fill in only what helps. Blank lines are allowed.



words for the *people around you*

Most of the people around you love you and are afraid of saying the wrong thing. These are words you can borrow, change, text or say out loud. Use the ones that sound like you.

to tell family ahead of time

"This year will look different for me. I may come late, leave early or step away for a while. Please don't take it personally."

when you want their name said

"It means so much when you say [name]'s name. Please don't worry that it will upset me."

when you'd rather not talk about it

"Thank you for asking. I don't want to talk about it today, but I'm glad you're thinking of them."

when someone says "at least..."

"I know you mean well. What helps me most right now is just having you here."

to say no to an invitation

"Not this year." That is a full answer. You don't have to explain.

when someone asks how you are

"Fine, thanks" is allowed. So is "Can I call you tomorrow?" You don't owe everyone the story.

when the tears come

"I'm okay. These tears are love."

to ask for help

"Could you help with [shopping / wrapping / the kids] this week? That would mean a lot."

for the people who love you

Say their name. Sit with the hard parts instead of trying to fix them. Offer something specific: "I'm bringing dinner Tuesday" helps more than "let me know if you need anything." Skip "I can't imagine." Try "I don't know what to say, but I'm here." Remember the hard days in January too.

My own words:



why the holidays *feel so heavy*

If this season feels harder than you expected, you are not doing grief wrong. Here is what people who study grief have found, in plain words.

grief comes in waves

STROEBE & SCHUT, DUAL PROCESS MODEL

Moving back and forth between missing them and tending to everyday life is a healthy part of grief. Taking a break from grief is not forgetting them.

love doesn't end

KLASS, SILVERMAN & NICKMAN, CONTINUING BONDS

Staying connected through their name, stories and rituals is normal and healthy. The holidays are a natural time to make room for them.

your grief needs a witness

DAVID KESSLER

Grief needs to be seen. Saying their name out loud, and having someone really listen, can ease some of the weight.

all feelings belong

DAVID KESSLER

Anger, numbness, jealousy of happy families, even relief that their suffering is over. All of it is normal. No feeling means you loved them less.

plan, don't just brace

DR. ALAN WOLFELT, HEALING YOUR HOLIDAY GRIEF

Talking honestly with family before the holidays, and giving yourself permission to do what feels right instead of what's expected, can make the season gentler.

there is no timeline

A first holiday can be hard. So can a fifth, or a twentieth. A hard year is not going backward. It is love, still here. If the loss was sudden or traumatic, the dates around it can hit harder. Plan more support, not less.

when to reach out for more help

Talk with a doctor, counselor or grief therapist if, a year or more after the loss, the longing is so strong that most days are hard to get through, or you feel numb, cut off from life, or like life has lost its meaning. These can be signs of Prolonged Grief Disorder (DSM-5-TR), and real support is available. You don't have to wait a year to ask for help. Reach out sooner any time you're struggling to eat, sleep or get through the day.

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one more page: made with their name

made with *their name*



Their name belongs on the pages. Alongside the workbooks, I make personalized pages and keepsakes, so the person you love is right there on the cover, the tree and the table. Made by a mom who has been there.



a workbook with their name

Any edition of I Am Grieving, Now What? with your person's name on the cover. Add a photo or a memory page if you'd like.



a personalized memory journal

A printed spiral journal with their name, shipped to your door. Black and white or full color.



a cardinal ornament with their name

The Christmas in Heaven cardinal, with their name and years, for the tree.



their name, on the wall and the table

A "Say their name" print with your person's name, and a cardinal mug made with their name.

find them all in my shop

HARPERSHEARTPRESS.ETSY.COM

Holiday printables, workbooks for every family member, and personalized gifts

Have a question about personalizing? Message me on Etsy. I read every message.

I'm Niki, Harper's mom and a certified grief educator. I made these pages after losing my daughter, Harper. Every price in my shop ends in .55, her volleyball and basketball number.
harpersheartpress.etsy.com · payhip.com/harpersheartpress

With love, Niki
Real tears. Real love.