



DAYBREAK

In touch during a time of grief

Make Every Day Count

*In **Make Every Day Count**, persons who have lost a loved one share their experiences. This month, Nancy J. recalls how her family's holidays changed after the death of her father, Bob.*

“Our first Thanksgiving after my dad died was really tough. That had always been one of his favorite holidays, and his absence was felt really dramatically. A new tradition started almost accidentally. After saying grace, we all mentioned something we were thankful for. No one really wanted to do this because we were all so sad. Then, one of the grandchildren said he was thankful for his Grandpa’s silly jokes. Then we all joined in, sharing memories of my dad that had made him so special to us. This has become a new tradition with our family. At holiday dinners, we make a point to recount a funny episode, share a special memory, or sometimes pass around a photo of our dad taken on holidays in years past. That way, he has stayed a part of our holiday tradition. This has been a great comfort to all of us, especially my mom. My dad is not sitting at the table with us...but he’s there.”

Handling the Holidays and Special Anniversaries

For many people, holidays and special anniversaries are times of year marked by festive celebrations and gatherings with family and friends. For those who are struggling with the death of a loved one, these can be difficult times, full of painful reminders that may magnify their sense of loss.

One of the best ways to approach holidays and anniversaries after the loss of a loved one is to give yourself permission to do what’s comfortable. At special times of year that are often guided by tradition, you should find a way to do what’s right for you. Some grieving people find it helpful to spend holidays with family and friends. Others may wish to avoid old traditions and try something new. Do what feels right for you.



Following are some guidelines for coping with holidays...and special days such as birthdays and anniversaries...after the loss of a loved one.

Plan for the approaching event...This may be a difficult time for you. The additional stress may affect you emotionally and physically. This is a normal reaction. Be prepared for the stress and make plans to be good to yourself.

Acknowledge that the event will not be the same. Expecting everything to be the same might lead to disappointment and additional sadness. Doing things differently will help you acknowledge the change while preserving memories of the past. Blend an old tradition with a new one.

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Be careful about isolating yourself.

Your first inclination might be to avoid events by staying apart from friends and other family members. Though it's all right to make some time for yourself, don't cut yourself off from the support of those who love you.

Share your feelings with family and friends.

Holidays and anniversaries affect other family members, too. In preparation, you should talk with your loved ones and share your feelings. You should work together to come up with an approach to the event that is comfortable for all involved.

Avoid additional stress. This is good advice for everyone, but it is especially important for those who are grieving. Decide what things you want to do during the holidays or to mark a special anniversary, and what commitments or activities you want to avoid. Stick to your plan!

Remembering Your Loved One at Special Times

Don't ignore your feelings, or your sense of loss, during the holidays and at anniversaries. Instead, you may want to commemorate your loved one at this time. Following are a few ideas:

- Put together a photo album or collage from photos you've "been meaning to get to"
- Volunteer at a church or community organization that was meaningful to your loved one
- Light a commemorative candle on your mantel or during a holiday meal
- Share a warm or amusing holiday memory that includes your loved one...send it in a letter or card to friends and family members
- Make a holiday gift in memory of your loved one



We Are Here To Help

It's important to talk about your loss with compassionate friends and family. Many people also seek the comfort of support groups during this difficult time. The Daybreak Bereavement Program, provided by the hospice services of Advocate Aurora Health at Home, offers a wide range of opportunities for individual or group support. For more information, or talk to a bereavement counselor, please contact:

- Illinois 800-813-5185
- Wisconsin 800-862-2201