



November-December 2021

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS-CHAPTER 2358

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*Facebook Page: Compassionate Friends of
Charlotte, NC*

MONTHLY MEETING

Meeting place: St. Matthew Catholic Church, 8015 Ballantyne Commons Parkway, Charlotte, NC - Room 234-235

Meeting Time: 3rd Tuesday of Each Month at 7:00 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

We are so pleased to announce that we will, once again be able to meet in person. We look forward to seeing you on Tuesday, Nov.16, 2021 at St. Matthews Catholic Church, 8015 Ballantyne Commons Parkway, Charlotte, NC - Room 234-235. All CDC, state and local guidelines /precautions will be observed including appropriate social distancing, using hand sanitizer and wearing a mask. For families who are not yet ready to meet in person, the meeting will be accessible by way of Zoom. You will receive a Zoom invitation the week before. We respectfully request members who have not been vaccinated against Covid 19 to participate via Zoom.

REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Regional Coordinators for NC: Donna & Ralph Goodrich

Phone Number: 980-938-4589

E-mail: iluvu2lauren@gmail.com

NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends
(877-969-0010)

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www.compassionatefriends.org

online private closed facebook pages:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/>

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TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!!

We congratulate you on having the courage to walk through our door for the first time. Please give our meetings at least 3 tries before deciding if they are right for you. We hope, with the resources available through TCF, you will find the right person or the right words to help you. You Need Not Walk Alone, We Are The Compassionate Friends.

TO OUR SEASONED MEMBERS:

We need your encouragement and support. TCF continues because of YOU. You give hope to the newly bereaved - hope that they too can eventually find joy in life again. Please attend when you feel you are able to reach out to another bereaved parent, grandparent or sibling.

Did you know that TCF Charlotte has its own Facebook page? Just search in facebook groups for - Compassionate Friends of Charlotte, NC

LIKE our Facebook page and please post any article, quote or personal musings that you feel may help another member. All information for meetings and special events will be listed on our facebook page.

PLEASE VISIT US ON OUR WEBPAGE!!

WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF TCF CHARLOTTE STEERING COMMITTEE?

We need your help. Volunteering to be on our Steering Committee is a wonderful way to give back to the organization that helped you when you were starting your grief journey, and what better way to keep your child, grandchild or sibling's memory alive? Contact any of the leaders at our meetings if you would like more information. We need YOUR help to ensure our Chapter is as successful as possible in helping others. This is YOUR Chapter - help us make it a welcoming and caring place for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings to come to for help.

Our Chapter survives by donations only. There are costs associated with the Chapter, i.e., supplies, books, refreshments, food and supplies for our annual events, and our fee for our website. PLEASE help support our Chapter!!! Please consider donating to your Chapter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling on their special days or during the holidays. What better thing to do in their memory than to pay it forward for the help you have received from TCF.

You can also help you chapter by being a Steering Committee Member. Just contact one of our chapter leaders. We have lots of different areas that we need help in.

Please Mail All Donations to Our TCF Charlotte Treasurer at The
Following Address:
Carolyn Patton
5902 Rimerton Drive
Charlotte, NC 28226-8227

WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING MEMORIAL SERVICE

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting on the 2nd Sunday in December unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit on December 12th, 2021 at 7:00 pm local time, hundreds of thousands of people commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (WCL), a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. TCF's WCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance and has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held, and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes, as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died and will never be forgotten.

The Charlotte Chapter of TCF is so very disappointed that we are not able to have an “in-person” candle lighting event this year. Because of ongoing Covid 19 concerns we do not have access to space in St. Matthew’s where we held this event in the past. We invite you all to participate in the candle lighting from home by joining the event on the national website. Go to www.compassionatefriends.org for more information.

TO OUR MEMBERS

If there are any errors in dates or names in our listing of our children's, grandchildren's or sibling's, please let me know. We are trying to get our database as accurate as possible. Many of our loved ones names do not have a last name listed. In these cases, we assume it is the same as the parent, grandparent or sibling who is

listed as a member in our database. If this is incorrect, please let me know. There are many names that do not have a birth date or a death date listed. We know this can be very difficult to list, especially in the early days of grief. If you feel like adding those dates, just email them to me at: fletcher1mom@gmail.com. We are only human so we do make mistakes, but I have tried to be as accurate as I possibly can. Thank you for understanding.

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR BIRTHDAYS - NOVEMBER

Justin Ferdinand 11/25
Michelle DiBernardini 11/19
Tim Boyer 11/22
Nolan Brantley 11/18
Colleen Louise Brooks 11/15
Dylan Burke Hahn 11/24
Eric Carlson 11/19
Trenton James Scott 11/15
John Cory Foil 11/9
Josselyn Giebeler 11/4
Caitlin Taylor Patton 11/14
Diana Phillipi 11/19
Ian Christian Lampkin 11/27
Christopher Lloyd 11/22
Michael Mahoney 11/23
Cory S. Flynt 11/29
Ryan Monfeli 11/15
James O'Keefe 11/6
Kyle Bodord 11/10
Justin Zuk 11/25
Matthew Lee Puckett 11/2
Hannah Quinton 11/11
Tim Roddey 11/14
Sadie Schuster 11/14
Loren Silva 11/9
Bill Twaddell 11/30

William Twitty 11/21

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR ANGEL DAYS -
NOVEMBER

Stephen Benish 11/28
Michael Rodas 11/12
Brian Courtemanchie 11/9
Lauren Ehele 11/30
John Cory Foil 11/9
Madelynn Charlotte Golbach 11/2
David Haney 11/24
Garrett Howison 11/21
Matthew Jackson 11/3
Ian Christian Lampkin 11/27
Chad Langdon 11/27
Anthony Mclain 11/12
Jeana Norton 11/3
Billy Patton 11/11
Kiara Pearse 11/14
Jameel Pearse 11/14
Matthew Lee Puckett 11/16
Michael Schexnayder 11/9
Amaani Ariana Shah 11/14
Greg Moore 11/8
Shamar Sheats 11/15
Jeremy Sprague 11/30
Bill Twaddell 11/17

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR BIRTHDAYS -
DECEMBER

Ayanna Addison 12/8
Lewis Addison 12/8
Christopher Brown 12/9
Nicholas Daniel 12/4
Creed Campbell 12/3
Thaddeus Cash 12/10
Luna Eve Hobbs 12/20

Tommy Horton 12/23
Isaiah Pinkney 12/31
Brian Michael Kirchner 12/3
Chad Langdon 12/22
Hannah Strickland 12/6
Michael McKinley 12/23
Lance Ferguson 12/21
Kelsey Morris 12/4
Eric Lemarier 12/12
Adam Mashburn 12/22
Jason Christopher Roberts 12/7
Silje Rowell 12/27
Heath Graves 12/28
Nicholas Simonette 12/15
Matthew Wright 12/30
Billy Trahey 12/25
Greg Vitiello 12/5
Jason Walters 12/10
Denis Anthony Giacobbe 12/31
Angela Harper 12/15
Lindsay N. Jerdo 12/16
Jonathan Holt Whitlow 12/26
Amanda Jen Ziegler 12/28

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR ANGEL DAYS -
DECEMBER

Cory Abernathy 12/1
John Joseph Gabriel Jr. 12/12
Vincent Chandler Edmond 12/13
Jennifer Eanes 12/12
Yasmine Anderson 12/16
Christopher Hall 12/25
Luna Eve Hobbs 12/20
Ashley Hurte 12/22
Jeremy Jenkins 12/7
Jasmine D. Thar 12/23

Ryan Monfeli 12/30
Ayriel E. Moore 12/6
Brian David Palmer 12/4
Tim Roddey 12/31
Sadie Schuster 12/7
Nicholas Simonette 12/29
Chris Taylor 12/10
Kekoa Teonkina 12/17
Lindsay N. Jerdo 12/24
Jason Lucas Armstrong 12/25
Jamaal Miller 12/14

HEART CONNECTIONS – THE BONDS OF SHARED GRIEF

Divisiveness and intolerance for others' views seem prevalent all around us today. We see it in our political beliefs, social justice concerns, and health environment. It is apparent within families, workplaces, and organizations. When we are grieving the painful death of a child, grandchild, or sibling, this divisiveness creates walls that can make our sorrow even deeper. It's difficult enough when we're grieving to feel connected to the people around us, and these dividing walls can further isolate us.

The Compassionate Friends credo begins with these words:

*We need not walk alone.
We are The Compassionate Friends
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.
The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes,
but our love for them unites us.*

Uniting people who share this deep grief was the premise that started The Compassionate Friends. The death of our brother, sister, child, or grandchild permeates all aspects of our being. It's something that can't easily be explained to those who have not experienced it, while those who have, possess a deep and compassionate understanding that

requires little explanation. The bonds within our TCF community can bridge these chasms we see around us. Rather than being further isolated in our grief, we can feel surrounded by understanding, community, and shared hope that can be lifesaving during this time.

While none of us would choose to be a part of this community given the reason that brought us, we are connected at a deeply meaningful level. It's hard to see someone across the table with a similar loss and stay in a place of intolerance and anger. When we remember what binds us as a group and honor our shared losses, we focus on supportive and comforting connectedness. When we reach for the love in our hearts that's bolstered by our shared sorrow, we can model a greater energy that's needed in our world. Our child, grandchild, or sibling who died and brought us to TCF is honored each time we choose this path of connection through our differences rather than more division because of them.

By

Shari O'Laughlin



16 Ideas for Creating New Holiday Tradition After a Death

[HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS](#) / HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS : ELEANOR HALEY

Someone you love has died and now the holidays will never be the same. I'm sorry to put this so plainly, but it's true, and you need to acknowledge it.

Too often, people stumble into the holidays after a death believing things can stay the same. Some passively assume everything will work out, while others think if they try hard enough to be positive and maintain old traditions that PEOPLE WILL ENJOY THEMSELVES DANG IT.

I hope these approaches work out for some, but I can promise you they won't suffice for all. The truth is, even if you manage to rebuild your tradition to the closest approximation possible, there will still be sadness. The "King" Elvis Presley said it best...

*"And when those blue snowflakes start falling
That's when those blue memories start calling"*

We've written posts on [how to handle existing holiday traditions](#) after a death, and we've written about [honoring deceased loved ones](#) at the holidays. Still, we've yet to get in-depth about creating new traditions after a loss.

The creation of new traditions and rituals provides you the opportunity to find meaningful and lasting ways to remember loved ones. Further, it allows those who have died to play a continuous role in holiday celebrations going forward.

We're going to provide you with a few ideas for creating new holiday traditions after a death. We encourage you to really think beyond this list and create traditions that are reflective of who your loved one was and how you want to see their legacy continue.

New traditions can be simple things you decide to do on your own or more elaborate rituals that you create with your family. As you think about this, remember traditions are meant to be repeated year after year, so choose something that your family can realistically keep going. Even better, create traditions that can be handed down to future generations.

16 Ideas for Creating New Holiday Tradition After a Death

1. Food:

- **Holiday Dish:** Choose your loved one's favorite dish (or recipe) and make sure the dish is present at your celebration year after year. For example, my family makes "Autie's beans". Why are they "Autie's beans"? I have no idea, I'm pretty sure "Autie's beans" are just plain ole green bean casserole!
- **Favorite Dessert:** Instead of choosing a dish, choose their favorite dessert to make every year.
- **Breakfast:** If the holiday dinner is crazy, crowded, and hectic, start a tradition of having your loved one's favorite breakfast foods with your immediate family.
- **After-Dinner Drinks:** If the person who died wasn't a part of the family celebration, start a tradition of meeting friends and family in the evening to remember the person who died over hot cocoa or eggnog.
- **Cookie Recipe:** This is my personal favorite, use your loved one's recipe to make Christmas cookies. I used my mother's recipe this year and shared them on Facebook with my far-away family.

2. Music

- **Holiday Playlist:** Have a go-to list of holiday songs that remind you of your loved one.
- **Sing:** Start a tradition that involves singing your loved one's favorite holiday songs. My family always sings *Silent Night* just before going to bed on Christmas Eve and it always makes me cry. ([Here's a post about when holiday songs become sad](#)) You could also try traditions like these...

- Have a caroling party before the holidays where you invite all your family and friends
- Have a sing-a-long after holiday dinner

3. Memory tablecloth:

This is an awesome idea that I saw [here](#). Every year, lay a special tablecloth and fabric markers or sharpies. Ask holiday guests to write down their favorite holiday memories, especially those that involve family members who are no longer present.

4. Light a Candle:

As a family, light a candle at the beginning of the holiday season and allow it to burn throughout. If you're not comfortable with a real candle, use a fake candle or a special light-up decoration.

5. Candle Ceremony:

On the night before the holiday or on the night of the holiday, gather everyone for a candle ceremony. Give everyone an unlit candle. The first person lights the first candle and shares a memory. They can share a memory of their deceased loved one(s), a memory from past holidays, or a time during the year when they felt their loved one's presence – you decide (it's your tradition after all)! After the first person shares their memory, they light the candle of the next person and that person shares a memory – so on and so forth. Once the last candle is lit, do something to close out the ceremony (for example: sing a song or say a prayer).

6. Blessing:

If a blessing is traditionally said at any point during the holiday, add a lyric, quote, verse, poem, or saying that reminds you of your loved one. Choose something that really reflects your loved one, even if it's silly or out of context.

7. Secret Signal:

Create a secret signal for your family members to give one another when something reminds them of the person who has died. This could be a signal used at any moment, happy or sad, throughout the year.

8. Give to Charity:

Every year chose a charity to give a gift to in your loved one's name. Keep the same process for choosing the charity each year – maybe you decide over Thanksgiving or you gather on the first Sunday of December, for example. Allow everyone to offer suggestions and then choose as a family. If you don't want to just make a monetary donation, look for shelters doing "adopt a resident" programs or opportunities to [buy gifts through an angel tree](#).

9. Go Somewhere Where You Feel Close to Your Loved One:

Start a tradition of visiting your loved one's grave or another place where you feel close to them on the holiday. Choosing a designated time, like first thing in the morning, may make it easier to plan and uphold this tradition.

10. Moment of Silence:

At your holiday celebration, allow people an opportunity to share the name of loved ones they've lost and then have a moment of silence to remember those people.

11. Tell Stories:

Every year on my daughter's birthdays I tell them about the day they were born. Why not start a tradition of telling special holiday stories on the holiday? Instead of reading the kids *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* when you tuck them into bed, start the tradition of telling them a story from a holiday when their loved one was alive.

12. Add an Extra Plate:

Always add an extra plate to your dinner table to symbolize your loved one's presence in everyone's hearts and minds.

13. Holiday Memory/Gratitude Box:

Leave a box, slips of paper, and pens out, and ask friends and family to write down their favorite holiday memories, memories of loved ones, or gratitudes. Ask them to put their slips in the box and read them over dessert. If you feel as though your family has had an especially tough year, writing down gratitudes might help people to shift their perspective a little bit.

14. Remembrance Ornaments and Trees:

Buy a new ornament every year that reminds you of your loved one. This could be an ornament that you think is pretty, a photo ornament, or an ornament that symbolizes something about your loved one. If children are affected by the loss, invite them to help you select the ornament or even allow them the opportunity to make the ornament themselves.

- **A tree for your loved one:** Consider buying a small tree specifically for these remembrance ornaments. This will give people an opportunity to look at the ornaments all together, ask questions, and reminisce. You might even consider having a specific tradition for decorating and lighting this tree.
- **A remembrance tree:** If you will have a lot of people at your celebration, or if you have a lot of visitors throughout the season (or if you work at a grief center or hospice), put up a remembrance tree. Set up a table with sharpies and ornaments people can write on close to the tree. Allow anyone who passes through to write the name(s) of their deceased loved one(s) on an ornament and invite them to hang their ornament on the tree.

15. Stockings and Garlands:

Set out slips of paper and pens and instruct people to write any of the following of the slips of paper.

- memories
- moments that made you think of/miss your loved one
- words of encouragement to other family members
- words of appreciation for other family members
- gratitudes

Have a designated stocking or garland ([here are some awesome garland ideas](#)) where people can share their slips.

16. Put Regrets to the Fire:

Henry Havelock Ellis said, “*All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.*” In addition to the memories and traditions you keep with you, you may also be holding onto things like regret, guilt, and feelings of resentment. Start a holiday tradition of lighting a fire, writing down your regrets from the past year, and then throwing your regrets into the fire to symbolize a fresh start.

Remembering Loved Ones on Thanksgiving + Dealing With Grief

/ Words by:

Dani Hart

Article Category:

Grief Wellness

The turkey is hot out of the oven, potatoes are mashed, the table is set. You're surrounded by loved ones at Thanksgiving dinner, and yet you somehow feel empty inside.

A once joyous time filled with laughter, good food, and even better memories, now feels like nothing more than a trigger to miss the one who's so painfully not there.

When we enter the holiday season grieving the loss of a loved one, everything feels different, flipped upside down. A piece is missing and we're often expected to go on living like everything is normal.

Bereavement is heavy and can easily become too much to carry alone when Thanksgiving, Christmas and other holidays approach.

As Megan Devine explains in [It's OK That You're Not OK...](#)

“The reality of grief is far different from what others see from the outside. There is pain in this world that you can't be cheered out of. You don't need solutions. You don't need to move on from your grief.

You need someone to see your grief, to acknowledge it. You need someone to hold your hands while you stand there in blinking horror, staring at the hole that was your life. Some things cannot be fixed. They can only be carried.”

So, if you're heading into the Thanksgiving meal missing a loved one who's recently passed away, know that you're not alone and it's totally okay to feel whatever you're feeling.

Reasons Thanksgiving Can Be Tough

Thanksgiving and other holidays are embedded in traditions – the ultimate routines – that connect us to our loved ones and allow us to relax.

When someone in our lives passes away, whether expected or unexpected, the memories stay with us, yet the routines that kept us grounded get thrown up to the wind.

Thanksgiving can be especially tough for those going through grief for a handful of reasons.

It was a loved one's favorite holiday.

Good food, comfy pants, and leftovers to last through the week make Thanksgiving dinner and break a favorite holiday for many people. It's a holiday that crosses religions and ethnicities to bring people together.

If the person who passed away loved Thanksgiving and did things to make it memorable for family and friends, them not being there makes it hurt that much more.

Whether it's an aunt who always enjoyed cooked the turkey or a grandfather who put his heart into making the homemade cranberry sauce, the missing

love for the holiday is easy to recognize when the passed person is no longer there.

This can make it exceptionally hard for those left grieving to enjoy the big Thanksgiving Day feast without them.

Traditions do not feel the same.

Whether it's waking up early and watching the Macy's Day parade, watching football in sweats, or running in a turkey trot before the big meal, families often have traditions during Thanksgiving.

These traditions may feel difficult to do without the energy of the missing loved one. The traditions will likely feel different for everyone involved and some people in the family may not know how to handle their emotions without the loved one present.

It's not uncommon for grieving people to protest carrying on the tradition without their loved one present, while others may want to carry on the tradition in their honor. Everyone experiences holiday grief differently, and that's OK.

Pressure to live up to their legacy.

Whether it's continuing on a big get together with all of the extended family members or trying to replicate the exact meal just like mom used to make, in many instances family members feel pressured to do the things the loved one who passed did during the holidays.

Many people want to please people in the way their loved one did, and will try to do whatever it takes to ensure they live up to the legacy.

This can often leave a grieving person running around, potentially avoiding the pain of grief while family is around, and then breaking down when everyone finally leaves, right when they may need someone's comfort the most.

Coping With Grief During Thanksgiving

While Thanksgiving is a time of year to be thankful for what you have, it can be difficult to tap into positive thoughts when all you can think about is your loved one not there.

No matter what you're feeling this Thanksgiving, it's important to know that it's okay to grieve. Grieving a recent death, or even one that happened a while back, is completely normal and acceptable.

“Holding the space is crucial, and exactly what we are missing. To hold the space is to create a ring of safety around the family and friends of the dead, providing a place where they can grieve openly and honestly, without fear of being judged.” — Caitlin Doughty, [From Here to Eternity](#)

Now, if you're looking for ideas for how you can create space to grieve your loved one this Thanksgiving, we've compiled a list of ideas that you can choose from. While you certainly don't have to try all of them, it may help to choose one or two ideas that feel right for you and add them to your Thanksgiving plans.

Talk about your loved one.

When someone you love passes away, you may very well want to acknowledge and honor the person during Thanksgiving. After all, you're used to spending the holidays together and you'd love nothing more than everything to return to normal.

By giving yourself and others permission to share stories and favorite memories about your loved one, you can find connection to their life while beginning the process of adjusting to the holidays without them by your side.

Talk about how you are feeling to friends and family and allow them to share in response. While this may bring up emotions, you're surrounded by people that love you and want to support you through your grief.

Journal.

Waking up on Thanksgiving morning and realizing you no longer have your loved one with you to share in the experience can be a sobering and emotional time.

Instead of bottling what you're thinking and feeling inside, try writing it all down in a journal or as a letter to your loved one.

Allowing yourself to feel and getting it outside of your head can help lift some of the weight off of your shoulders. And if you need to cry while you're writing,

let it out with no shame. This time is for you and will help you process what you're feeling as you navigate the day.

Reminisce over old photos.

There's no better time than the holidays to bring out old photos of family, especially ones of your passed loved one.

Dig up the old photo albums and ask other family members to do the same. Maybe you even start a shared digital album and ask friends and family to contribute photos that include your loved one.

As you go through the photos, either alone or with family and friends, try to remember the stories behind the photos and point out the great qualities of your loved one. Retell jokes, laugh, cry, and simply feel whatever surfaces, knowing that a range of emotions are common when going through the grieving process.

Continue Thanksgiving traditions.

While some traditions may be difficult to continue without your loved one, try identifying one that you can use to honor them moving forward. This will help you find ways to continue on in the spirit of your loved one.

If the tradition is too difficult for you to carry out this year, that's OK too. Either scrap it or ask someone else to carry out the holiday routine for this year. There will always be an opportunity to pick it back up in the following years.

Start new Thanksgiving traditions.

As families shrink and grow throughout the decades, some traditions end and new ones begin. If the old traditions are too much to handle or if you simply want to find a way to honor your loved one, consider starting a new tradition.

Maybe this year you ask everyone to contribute written compliments for everyone at the table, or you even give your leftovers to the homeless.

Whatever new tradition you think of, know that it's something you can choose to carry on moving forward or use as a one-time tradition. No pressure.

Talk to a support group or therapist.

If Thanksgiving is feeling overwhelming, know that you're not alone. There are [grief support groups](#) all over the country that can be great to attend during the holidays.

You'll find others who are going through grief and may find comfort in talking to people outside of your friends and family.

If you'd like more one-on-one guidance, [finding a grief therapist in your area](#) who specializes in helping people through this tough time in life is a great option.

If needed, take time for yourself.

Whether it's stepping outside to get some air and reflect after dinner or deciding to stay home this Thanksgiving, know that you have the option to create space for yourself to feel exactly what you're feeling. Self-care is crucial while grieving.

As the years go on, you may need less time to yourself to process everything that's going on. However, in the beginning allow yourself as much time as needed to sit in whatever you're feeling.

If you've been a caretaker for your loved one who passed, the holidays will likely be much different. You won't be running around taking care of another person and shuffling your needs to the side. You may even feel relief this Thanksgiving, and that's very normal. Allow yourself to feel whatever surfaces. Be kind and gentle with yourself as you welcome a new identity.

Ideas to Honor a Person You Loved on Thanksgiving

While Thanksgiving will likely be very difficult this year for anyone who's recently lost someone dear to them, there are ways to still honor the tradition of gratitude and warmth with your loved one in mind.

Leave an empty chair and place setting.

While this may intensify the emotions of grief for some, leaving an empty chair, place setting, or candle is a great way to allow the memory of your loved one to live on at the Thanksgiving meal this year.

It may be a good idea to check with the host ahead of time and ask if it would be okay to leave a seat for your loved one.

By starting dinner with a few words honoring your loved one, you can proactively start a conversation allowing your family and friends to get over some of the awkwardness they may be feeling around how to handle the situation. They want to be supportive, they likely just don't know how to be.

Do a toast or Thanksgiving prayer.

As you get ready to dig into your Thanksgiving feast this year, ask to give a toast or Thanksgiving prayer. Use this time to honor your loved one, sending them any message you want them and your family to hear.

If others in the family have passed away, it may be nice to bring them up in your toast as well to honor all who've made an impact on the people at the table.

Cook their favorite dish.

Whether it's bringing the apple pie as dessert to your aunts house like your husband always did, or playing the piano once everyone is too stuffed to move like your dad used to play, replicating your loved one's favorite dish or activity can be a great way to honor them this Thanksgiving.

Take the time to tell a joke or recount a memory as you recognize that the dish was their favorite. Savor every smell and bite for them.

Donate food or money to a charity in their name.

Whether you donate to their favorite cause or adopt a family in need of a Thanksgiving meal, giving to those less fortunate during a time of grief can be a great way to connect to your loved one and also help you feel better.

Do a Thanksgiving run or walk.

Many communities hold fundraising turkey trots during the Thanksgiving holiday, so you can consider participating in their honor. Invite your family and any of your loved one's friends to join you for the race.

The endorphins you'll get from the race along with the extra movement will help you feel better and get nice and hungry for the Thanksgiving meal.

Create a special Thanksgiving centerpiece.

Another option is to order a special flower arrangement or create your own Thanksgiving centerpiece with photos of your loved one and other related memorabilia.

This will serve as a beautiful visual reminder of the love you share for your passed loved one.

Watch something they loved.

If your loved one enjoyed watching a certain movie or even just kicking back and enjoying a game of football, partaking in these activities can help you feel closer to them when they are no longer there.

Whether you ask your family to join you in the activity or wait to be alone, watching something your loved one enjoyed is something that may bring you great peace, or opportunity to cry your eyes out this holiday.

Visit their grave or a place they found special.

Getting out of the house and getting a strong physical connection with your loved one is another option for this Thanksgiving.

Whether you visit their grave alone, or go for a walk in the park you used to walk in together, finding whatever spot you know they'd find special and spending some time there will help you get some fresh air and connect to their memory.

Conclusion

While we've outlined options for you to try as you navigate grief during Thanksgiving this year, we hope you know that you're not alone. This year's holiday season will likely be difficult and full of conflicting emotions, but it will get better. As licensed psychologist Dr. Ryan Howes explains...

"Grief is not something to hide or run from, but rather something to embrace and honor. Do this in the most direct and meaningful way possible, and then turn your attention back to the present, and try to create new joyful memories."

So this year as you honor your loved one, remember that Thanksgiving is all about finding what we are thankful for in life. Be thankful for the time, love, and memories you shared with your loved one.

Take the love, strength, and gratitude surrounding you this Thanksgiving into the rest of our days as you adjust to a new normal. It will get easier.

Coping with Christmas

After your child has died, the arrival of the Christmas season can feel most unwelcome. The whole world seems to be celebrating. Everybody appears to be obsessed with preparations that go on for many weeks. There is no escape – Christmas is all over the shops and streets, on TV, radio, in magazines, and on the web and social media. This can leave you, the bereaved parent, feeling alienated and isolated by your grief.

As you contemplate Christmas – especially in the early years of your bereavement – you might wonder how you will survive. All of the talk about family reunions can make your heart sink, as you know that your child will not be with you during these days. The enormous gap left by their death is intensified. Bereaved parents often feel they just

want to 'cancel' Christmas. Christmas cannot be the same as it was because the family unit is not the same. It is not complete.

If this is the first year, it will be painfully different from previous years. You may find the anticipation and stress of what you 'should' be doing very hard to deal with. Do you decorate the tree, send cards, give presents, attend a place of worship, join in the festive meal, go to a family party? If you have younger children or grandchildren, do you continue with important traditions of trips to the shops, the decorations, a pantomime, and a visit to see Father Christmas? If you are a lone parent, you may now find ourselves literally alone in your home.

Many bereaved parents find the run up to Christmas – with all the accompanying anticipation – can be more difficult to cope with than the actual day itself. The New Year celebrations looming in the background may be equally unwelcome. We hope that some of the ideas below might help and support you as you prepare for the holiday season...

- Do what feels right to you. Don't allow other people to dictate how you should get through this extremely difficult time of year. Don't feel you have to go to the office party or festivities with friends/extended family if you can't cope with them.
- Sometimes you don't know what you will feel like doing until the last minute. Don't feel you have to give others advance notice. Tell people you will decide on the day and you will come if you feel up to it, but may well not be able to.
- You might like to develop a Christmas ritual involving your child – attend a candle-lighting service with other bereaved parents; spend time at a special memorial place on your own or with others; make or buy a special card or decoration for your child.
- You may want to tell people that you need to have your child acknowledged by others at Christmas – to see their name in a Christmas card or to remember them with a toast during a festive meal means so much. Some people would be scared of doing this unless you tell them.
- Some parents don't send cards at Christmas any more. Others like to include their child's name – for example - "Love from X x and x and always remembering xx". You can also ask others to include a similar sentiment on any cards they send you. This small gesture can really lift a parent's heart.
- Let close friends or family know that you are struggling and need to be able to talk about your child at this important family time.
- With family members or others you are close to, try to talk together about how you are feeling, or what you all might want to do. Thinking and talking together can help you to prepare yourselves for Christmas, and sometimes when these plans do go right, the day can bring surprising comfort.

- If you have young children, be aware that they might wish for Christmas to carry on as before. Although this can be enormously painful for you, for surviving children the normality of Christmas celebrations can be important. Watching them enjoy themselves may be satisfying, although still painful.
- Don't put too much stress on yourself. If there are difficult relations who expect to visit or for you to visit them, just say you can't do it this year if it's going to make you feel worse. Alternatively, introduce a time limit - "We'll come over for a quick drink but will only stay an hour."
- Spend time with people who understand. Where possible, avoid those who don't.
- On the day itself, make time for yourself to escape if things are too much. A walk outside can really help ease tensions. Or take yourself off for a long warm bath.
- Some parents find that volunteering for a charity helping the homeless or elderly over Christmas is a positive distraction. You are helping yourself and doing good too.
- Try to take some gentle exercise every day. This helps boost those much needed endorphins.
- If you can't cope with the idea of Christmas at all, go away and do something completely different. (Be aware, though, that sometimes being away from supportive friends or family can be more difficult and the jollity of strangers may be painful.)
- It is not being disloyal to your child to feel happy at times. You might find yourself enjoying a special meal, a drink, the good company of friends, songs and music, or even Christmas services. Adjusting to life without your child means that hopefully, in time, you will find more joy in living than you do at present.
- Be aware that the New Year celebrations can also be difficult. The coming of a new year can feel like you are moving 'further away' from your child. The celebrations of others, wishing you a 'Happy New Year', can intensify your yearning and grief. You can feel isolated from the happiness of others. Acknowledge these feelings to yourself and others close to you. It might help to have a plan for the evening of December 31st – whether that is to be alone, or with close, understanding friends who will allow you to be yourself and remember your child at this poignant time of year.

After the death of your child, the Christmas holidays will have shadow, a yearning for what might have been, an added poignancy. However, we bereaved parents do survive these days, difficult as they are. What matters is that, as far as possible, you are able to do whatever feels right for you, and eventually be able to carry the loving memory of your child with you into future Christmas-times.

A Letter from The Editor

Hello Friends,

As the holidays approach I look forward to gathering with family and friends. I also have a feeling of dread. Grief is particularly painful during holiday events. The cherished memories, family gatherings, joyful occasions and honored traditions are marred by the absence of our child/grandchild/sibling. In the early years of my grief journey, I would work hard to suppress my gloom and feign glee. As I continue this journey, I find that I don't need that strategy any longer. I acknowledge my grief! It is who I am now, a bereaved mother. It's only natural that I would feel sad because my son is not here to celebrate with us. It is also natural to feel joy and love and friendship during the holidays. It is acceptable to do both, to feel grief and joy and to express those feelings. Be kind to yourself. You will get through this. I wish you all peace, happiness and good health.

**Warmly,
Susan**