



ANNIVERSARIES & HOLIDAYS

By now, you may have faced—or might be anticipating—anniversaries, holidays, birthdays, or other special days without your loved one. These days often bring fresh waves of grief, even years after your loss. Here are some tips that may help.

- 1. Plan ahead.** Mark special dates on your calendar, then think about what you may need that day. Are there things you want to do or to avoid? Having a loose plan can reduce anxiety and help you feel more in control.
- 2. Allow yourself grace.** Let yourself feel all your feelings without judgment. It's okay to scale back plans, make traditions easier, take breaks to collect yourself, or say no to invitations and expectations that feel overwhelming.
- 3. Honor your loved one** in a small, meaningful way on special days, such as:
 - Lighting a candle or incense
 - Sharing memories and stories
 - Cooking their favorite meal
 - Playing a song they loved
 - Writing a letter to them
 - Setting a place for them at the table
 - Visiting a special place
 - Putting flowers out for them
- 4. Ask for support.** Let trusted friends or family know the day might be hard for you. Ask for company, a check-in, or help with specific tasks.
- 5. Include children thoughtfully.** Include kids in activities that honor the person and let them express their feelings. Keep talks honest and age-appropriate. Contact us for information and support for grieving children.
- 6. Do something meaningful or uplifting.** Turning grief into purpose can be comforting. Consider volunteering, donating in your loved one's name, or doing something they used to enjoy.
- 7. Be kind to yourself.** You may not get through these special days as planned—and that's okay. Over time, you'll figure out what changes help you celebrate these days in a way that feels right.

There's no wrong or right way to handle anniversaries and holidays. What matters is honoring your needs and emotions, whether that means keeping old traditions, changing them, or doing something new.



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SPIRITUAL & EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS AFTER LOSS

After a loss, it's common to ask big questions: *Why did this happen? Where are they now? What's the meaning of life without them?* In finding the answers, some people deepen their faith after loss. Others walk away from their beliefs. Both are valid, normal responses.

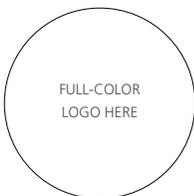
Even if you don't follow a religion, you may still find yourself wrestling with big questions about the meaning of life and death. Soul-searching is common after loss. We're not just missing the person. We're trying to make sense of the universe and our place in it.

Try the exercise below to explore these questions gently and without judgment. Find some quiet time to think about a big question on your mind now—or one you've thought about since your loss. Write or think about your answers.

Gentle exploration exercise

1. A big question I'm asking right now is:
2. This question makes me feel:
3. Something I struggle with (or that comforts me) about this question is:
4. Today, I will show myself kindness by:

There is no one "right" answer to big existential questions. If a question feels too big to answer, that's okay. You can always return to it when you feel ready. Simply asking the questions and noticing your feelings about them can lead to spiritual growth. **If you do not have a faith community but would like non-denominational spiritual support, contact us for more resources.**



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DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

“Disenfranchised grief” is grief over a loss that society may not fully acknowledge, accept, or understand. While the death of a close family member often receives support, many other types of losses are downplayed or dismissed, such as:

- Stillbirth or miscarriage at *any* stage in the pregnancy
- The death of a pet
- Loss of a partner in an unrecognized, unvalidated, or non-traditional relationship
- Losses that carry stigma or that might be judged, such as suicides, overdoses, or a death of someone who was in prison, estranged, or abusive
- The death of someone you were close with but not legally connected to, like a neighbor, coworker, teacher, or mentor

When your loss isn’t recognized, it can feel like you don’t have permission to grieve. Hurtful remarks—“*It was just a dog,*” “*You can have another baby,*” “*You weren’t even married*”—can leave you feeling isolated and make grief even harder.

Tips for coping with disenfranchised grief

- **Give yourself full permission to grieve.** Your pain is real, even if others don’t understand it. Knowing you’re feeling disenfranchised grief can help you understand why your loss feels so painful and invisible.
- **Seek supportive communities.** Look for groups, books, podcasts, blogs, or online spaces focused on your specific type of loss. Hearing others share similar experiences can be healing.
- **Set boundaries with others.** If someone dismisses your loss, it’s okay to say, “*This relationship mattered to me, and I need to grieve.*” You don’t need to explain or defend your grief to anyone.

No one else gets to decide whether your loss matters. If you’re grieving, it matters. Surrounding yourself with compassionate people can help you move through the pain—on your own terms, at your own pace. Let us know if you need referrals to grief resources specific to your loss.

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