

RESILIENCE RX™

A free resource

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

*Tips for managing
the triggers and
sadness*

RESILIENCE RX™

Self-care techniques

The science behind why they work and
how to implement them in everyday life



This free resource is designed to provide self-care techniques to support the bereaved with the understanding that the International Grief Institute is not engaged to render any type of psychological, legal, or any other kind of professional advice.



INTERNATIONAL GRIEF INSTITUTE, LLC
www.InternationalGriefInstitute.com



Coping with the holidays

“ Grief is individual as a snowflake.

UNKNOWN

When bah humbug fills your heart like coal

Dancing sugar plums. Chestnuts roasting over an open fire. Mall Santas balancing kids on one knee.

Once upon a time, scenes such as these filled my Playbook of Christmas Cheer. What's not to love about a season of yuletide festivities punctuated by Hallmark moments?

Plenty if you're missing someone you love.

Why are the holidays so painful? Not only are we missing our loved one, we're also missing future memories without that loved one. While friends and neighbors are decking the halls and hanging mistletoe, we're reliving memories of Christmas past when no chair sat empty at the dinner table.

Facing the holidays after losing a loved one can feel like a frosty field of emotional landmines. Every pumpkin spice ad is a nostalgic reminder of merrier times and can hark the herald of unending tears.

When reduced to a pile of ashes with no instructions for how to rebuild, how do we face the holiday season? How do we guide our family through the extra layer of sadness?

When we lost our daughter in 2009, I didn't want to find out. I wanted to hit the pause button and skip over not just the holidays, but the entire next century. Bah humbug filled my heart like coal. I felt like Ghosts of Christmas Past, the Grinch Who Stole Christmas, and Island of the Misfits all rolled into one giant emotional mess.

But one look into my young grandson's eyes told me I couldn't skip Christmas. As much as nothing in my life felt normal, normalcy felt like the right thing to do. I had to carry on.

With a heart that now felt a thousand sizes too small, I was determined to find a way to survive the holiday storm, if not for me, then for my family.

It wasn't easy, and autopilot often held the reigns of my sleigh. But the following steps guided me through those first few holiday seasons until my playbook once again filled with scenes of Christmas cheer, and I offer them here for any and all who find themselves facing the holidays without someone they love.

10 tips to surviving the holidays

Tip #1: Maintain your routine. Or not.

A familiar routine offers a sense of reassurance that at least one thing in life hasn't changed, and the familiarity can help ground us through the holiday hustle. But if the idea of sticking to routine is more than you can bear, then honor your need to break tradition. In short, do what feels most soothing to your heart and apologize to no one.

Tip #2: Protect your time

Give yourself lots of breathing room and avoid packing the schedule too full. Grieving is emotionally exhausting; plenty of rest will help minimize raw nerves through the flurry of shopping, school performances, and parties.

Tip #3: Cut yourself some slack, not your finger

Cut some slack and buy store-bought. Grieving is naturally distracting and the ER isn't a great place to dine. Let the store butcher operate the carving knife. Even the smallest kitchen disaster can quickly deplete coping skills. If the family expects your legendary dinner rolls, then cheat with gourmet mashed potatoes and gravy from the deli.

Trip #4: Skip the chaos.

Turn off the computer, light a fragrant candle, grab a soft blanket, and binge-watch a good comedy. Take time to create peaceful surroundings to soothe your nerves.

Tip #5: The Rules of 5

Treat your senses to the Rule of 5. Your emotions are raw, but your body could use some TLC. Each day acknowledge 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Wear a soft scarf (feel). Enjoy an eggnog latte (taste). Use aromatherapy soap in the shower (smell). You get the idea. Small gestures like these offer your physical body a reminder that not all pleasure is lost and allow us to deposit small moments of joy in our hearts to help balance the sadness.

Tip #6: When the mood strikes . . .

Feel joy without guilt. Give yourself permission, because it releases positive hormones that are good for your brain. If you find yourself humming to holiday music, don't stop. The heart can feel joy the same time as sorrow, and it helps to balance the sadness. Allow yourself to experience moments of joy without guilt. Your spirit needs it.

Tip #7: Honor the past

Find a way to include your loved one's memory in the festivities. Hang their stocking and fill it with cat toys or dog treats to share with the family pet on Christmas morning. Visit your loved one's favorite coffee stand and pay it forward. Buy a small bouquet of balloons in your loved one's favorite color and leave it in a public spot for a stranger to find.

Tip #8: Heal others

Do something in the community that lifts your spirits. It induces a "helper's high" that's good for the brain, it's gratifying to the heart, and is a good reminder that we aren't alone in our struggles. It helps us keep perspective that the holidays can be hard for a variety of reasons, and helping others helps our own heart to heal.

TIP #9: Seek out support.

Surround yourself with others who speak your loss language. A quick internet search will likely reveal a number of local groups led by seasoned griever trained to hold a sacred space for your sorrow. If that isn't your style, grab one of the books in the award-winning Grief Diaries series, take a self enrichment class through the International Grief Institute, or join the growing number of live Facebook events without leaving your living room. No matter how you seek support, surrounding yourself with others who speak the language of sorrow is an important part of healing.

TIP #10: Cry

Give in to the tears. There is no shortage of raw emotions over the holidays, and crying is not a sign of weakness. It's how we release intense feelings. A good cry can be very healing and serves as an important part of our journey.

Gifting yourself with compassion, kindness, and grace

I've now weathered enough silent nights without our daughter to know that although she will always be sorely missed every day of the year, restoring joy is possible.

Allow yourself to try a handful of the suggestions above to guide you through the emotional kaleidoscope that descends with every pumpkin spice ad. In the end, gift yourself a little compassion, kindness, and do whatever feels best to your heart until your playbook of Christmas Cheer holds joy—both past and present.

Warm regards,

Lynda Cheldelin Fell

Foundering partner, International Grief Institute



A word about resilience



Life doesn't get easier or more forgiving,
we get stronger and more resilient.

JAMAIS CASCIO

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to adapt to life difficulties—including loss of a loved one. Building resilience through strategies that support the brain, body, and emotions during difficult times can help reduce the damaging effects of grief.

The goal

The goal of Resilience Rx™ is to offer self-help techniques that trigger positive hormones—dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin—to help support you as you learn to move forward with your loved one in your heart.

How do you strengthen resilience?

The first step is to take good care of yourself. We can't always predict loss and other stressors, but practicing self-help techniques that tend to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs can help us to weather the storms.

There are multiple ways to trigger positive hormones. Use this Resilience Rx™ resource as one of your tools in your self-care toolbox to help lift your spirits and soothe your heart when mourning the loss of someone you love.



Bonus tips

“ Every day is a bonus.

GEOFFREY BOYCOTT

More self-help techniques to help with grief:

- Chew gum
- Stomp on bubble sheets
- Meditate
- Pray
- Change the channel
- Take up a craft that requires repetitive hand motions such as beading, knitting, clay modeling, chocolate making, woodworking
- Yoga
- Deep breathing
- Kiss
- Acupressure
- Listen to music
- Watch a viral video
- Paint the walls
- Plant flowers
- Weed
- Deadhead the roses
- Dry skin brushing
- Buy a plant
- Get a pet