

Coping with grief during the holiday season

Sponsored content by Maxine Nunes, Brand Ave. Studios contributing writer

When you've lost a loved one, the holiday season can be especially difficult.

"Society and cultural norms send messages that this should be the best time of the year, a time to be together with those we love when everything is merry and bright. But when we've lost someone, our hearts and souls may not feel that way," said Lauren Jensen, MSW, LCSW, Wisconsin community liaison for the HeartLight Center, a nonprofit grief-support organization.

Cress Funeral & Cremation Services, in partnership with HeartLight, has provided this guidance to help you navigate the season.

HONOR YOUR NEEDS

It's a hectic time of year for everyone: cards to send, gifts to buy, parties you're invited to or the holiday dinner you traditionally host. When you're grieving, the pressure can be overwhelming. You tire more easily and can't always think clearly — so it's important to understand that the cause is actually physiological.

"Research has shown that the brain's response to grief can cause this physical and mental exhaustion, and trying to push through it can be extremely hard," Jensen said.

So don't take on more than you can handle. People will understand.

Keep in mind, though, that sometimes going to a party or having a few guests over, even for a short time, can be a welcome distraction.

"You may even experience moments of joy," she said. "That doesn't mean you aren't grieving, so don't feel guilty about it."

GIVE YOURSELF THE SPACE TO EXPERIENCE YOUR EMOTIONS

"We encourage people to pause, take a breath and let the body process what it's experiencing," said Jensen. "You don't have to dive into the deep end — just dip your toe in."

Simple practices like listening to music, journaling or curling up in a chair with a cozy blanket can help you connect with your feelings. It's also good to have a trusted person you can reach out to, someone who can be a comfort to you when you need it.



SMALL REMEMBRANCES CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

"When someone dies, our love doesn't die with them, and even as the years go by you can include them in your celebrations, even if it's something subtle or small," Jensen said.

You can light a candle for them, wear something that reminds you of them or cook their favorite dish. Every year, Jensen bakes the same Swedish tea ring her grandmother always made to continue the tradition.

Sharing stories at family gatherings is another way to keep that connection alive. Hearing others' memories can ease the loneliness and remind you that your loved one is still remembered.

CRESS AND HEARTLIGHT ARE THERE TO HELP

The HeartLight Center offers virtual and in-person grief groups, which are one of the most effective ways of coping with loss by connecting with others who truly understand what you're experiencing.

For those who lose a loved one during the holidays, the caring team at Cress Funeral & Cremation can help you create a celebration of life that includes meaningful holiday memories of them.

And each December, Cress holds a Community Remembrance and Candle Lighting event, where you can share reflections, music and other mementos of those who have passed.

For more information, visit cressfuneralservice.com and heartlightcenter.org.