

## Reduce Holiday Stress by Focusing on Realistic Expectations



The holiday season tends to be stressful for all of us, yet when you're grieving, the season is filled with even more anxiety. A time that should bring joy may instead bring just the opposite. One way to help you cope with the hustle and bustle of the season is to reduce holiday stress by focusing on realistic expectations.

Our expectations—both positive and negative—tend to bring added stress to an already 'emotionally charged' time. We try to do more than we can realistically handle; we expect everything to be perfect; we want everyone to be on their best behavior; we want each person we encounter to radiate the spirit of the season; and on and on. These are completely unrealistic expectations, and we're sure to be disappointed.

On top of the typical expectations, when you're grieving, even more is going on in your heart and head. You wonder how you'll react (and how everyone else will respond) to the absence of your loved one. You worry whether you'll be able to make it through the day's activities. You may not be mentally or physically able to tackle your typical preparations. You're concerned about other people's expectations for you.

Stop! Let go of all your 'shoulds.' File them away for another time.

You have permission to realize (and admit) that this year will be a little different—and that it's okay. It's all right if this year is more subdued. It's okay if you do less. It's okay if you talk about your loved one and shed a few tears. It's not only okay, but it's much better if you don't push yourself to do too much! You can do more at a later date. Right now, you're only making changes for this year. You can adjust again, if necessary.

Don't try to make this year like all the rest. Focus on relaxing, being thankful for what you still have, and finding small joys within the things you *choose* to do and the people you *decide* to spend time with. Accept that *you have permission* to make choices about how you'll celebrate. You don't have to be driven or bound by the choices of other people around you. And be sure to make plans, however simple and lowkey they may be. Don't leave your plans up to chance.

I love this photo of the 'Christmas dogs.' I smile whenever I see it! Look for some things to bring a smile to your face. You may feel insincere at first, but keep on trying!



Yes, this year may include inescapable feelings of pain and sorrow for you. And this Christmas may be a far cry from Christmases past. But you *can* make things easier on yourself—and it's still possible to experience joy along with sadness. Adjust your expectations and reduce your stress whenever and wherever possible. Take control of your holidays instead of leaving details to chance, or letting the holidays (and other people) take control for you.

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