

Coping with Holiday Stress and Grief



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By Kristin Woodling
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The holiday season is among us and it is a magical time of year that brings joy, cheer, blessings, and family togetherness.

Except for when it doesn't.

For people coping with loss in their life (death of loved one, divorce, job challenges, etc.) the holiday season can bring a deep sense of sadness and isolation. It's difficult to express that you're sad when everyone around you is "over the top" merry and expects you to share that state of bliss.



Adding another layer of stress to this topic, specifically for professional women, is the expectation to lead with strength and enthusiasm during an often busy time of year for business. Meanwhile in our personal lives, we decorate the house, bake cookies, mail out greeting cards, make sure the whole family

has the perfect gifts, plan elaborate meals, and not to mention making sure we look put together and "happy" for the holiday parties. Enough is enough!

If you or someone you know are coping with holiday grief and stress,

compassion is key! Denial, sadness, anger and bargaining are normal parts of grief and can be amplified during the holidays. It's OK if you don't feel cheerful this December. It's not OK to let grief take you down a dark rabbit hole.

Here are some healthy tips for coping:

- Be realistic with time and energy

When you have the flu, you don't expect to be able to keep up your normal routine. When you are not feeling well emotionally, be sure to cut yourself some slack. Acknowledge what has to be done versus what you want done.

- Make new traditions

The holiday season is often tied to long lasting traditions for families. A loss in life of any kind, equates to change that may prevent you from carrying on familiar traditions. Consider ways of cherishing and carrying on old traditions while giving yourself permission to start new ones. This is the process of establishing a "new normal."

- Find support.

People around you may not always disclose their grief. As a therapist of more than 10 years, I can assure you that you are not alone with your struggle. Whether it's friends, a support group, or therapy, find a safe place to express yourself with people who are available to listen and support you.

- Take emotional breaks.

Grief is exhausting! Give yourself permission to take emotional breaks. Maybe it's an hour a day that you commit to watching a funny movie, mindfully enjoying an old hobby, or take time to reflect on the good things going on around you despite your loss.

Trauma has potential to serve a positive purpose and impact on life that follows. It is difficult to make sense of this concept in early stages of grief before purpose is revealed. I hope anyone reading this who is currently suffering finds comfort in knowing that the pain is not as painful as it is today forever. Sadness becomes less intense and less frequent over time allowing more space to celebrate life.

Kristin Woodling, LMHC is the owner of Pamper Your Mind, a counseling center in Indian Harbor Beach that caters to professional women. She is also a graduate of the weVENTURE Ignite 360 Mentoring Program for small businesses.

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