



**Hospice of Dubuque**  
*Community. Compassion. Nonprofit.*

This *Holiday Help* handbook has been developed by Hospice of Dubuque to provide grieving individuals with guidance in planning for, and coping with, the holiday season. Printing costs have been generously donated by *Egelhof, Siegert & Casper Westview Funeral Home*.



**Egelhof, Siegert & Casper Westview**  
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# Holiday Help

Hope and healing for those who grieve

What will I do this *holiday* season?

**Weep** for you, miss you.

Be *kind* to a stranger because of our love.

Invoke your *name* so others will honor you.

Stand in awe at the **beauty** of all you are.

Meditate on your life and death.

*Carry* you in my heart wherever I may journey.

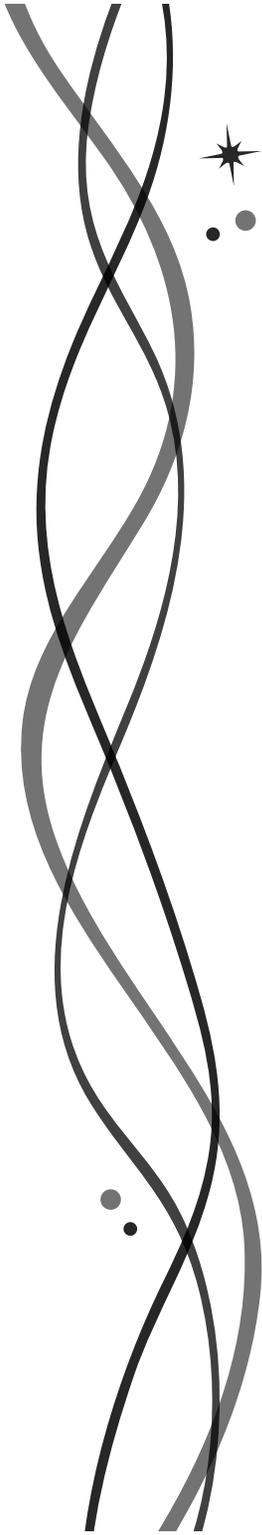
Show mercy to *children* and animals.

Ask for your **forgiveness** and presence.

Unfold your *love* into the world.

**Remember your beauty.**

- Dr. Joanne Cacciatore



After a loved one dies, life is forever changed. As much as we would like, there is no way to escape the grief that is born from the pain of death. We are affected emotionally and physically, and may feel anxious and overwhelmed with day to day activities.

As the holidays approach, people often feel even more anxious and more overwhelmed with those simple day to day activities. It is important to pause and remind yourself to take things a day at a time, sometimes an hour at a time.

Just as the anticipation of the holidays can exceed the excitement of the actual day, the anxiety leading up to the holidays is often much worse than the day itself. If you are wondering how you will handle the upcoming holidays without your loved one, we recommend planning ahead. By thinking about the elements that will be the hardest for you this holiday season, you can minimize stress and lessen the likelihood of being caught off guard by difficult situations. Use this *Holiday Help* handbook to assist you in organizing your thoughts, and ultimately decide what needs to be done and what is most important to you.

# Tips for surviving the holidays\*

1. Acknowledge that holiday traditions may have to change. Don't be afraid to do things differently.
2. Create a new tradition that honors your loved one.
3. Allow yourself to recognize your grief. Celebrations will encompass sad moments as well as joyful ones.
4. Decide where you want to spend the holidays. If it doesn't feel right to keep the holiday location the same, choose a new place.
5. Acknowledge that you do not have to live up to expectations for the holiday season. Know your own limits! You may not want to entertain, send cards, shop, etc. Be honest. Decide what you can do comfortably and ask others for help.
6. Let family and friends know how you feel and what you need—time to talk, time alone, time with others, time to remember.
7. Consider doing something for others. Call someone you know that is alone. Adopt a needy family for the holidays. Invite a guest to attend holiday activities with you.
8. If stress, anxiety, depression and loneliness become overwhelming, treat yourself to a counselor. Maybe you've been putting it off, so this would be the time to talk to someone.
9. Pick a few special items that belonged to your loved one and give them to people you know will appreciate them.
10. Skip holiday events if you are in holiday overload.
11. Don't get trapped. When you go to events, drive yourself so you can leave if you start to feel overwhelmed.
12. Spend some time looking at old photos or watching home videos and reminisce about the past.
13. Do your shopping online.
14. Plan something that you can look forward to in January and February to alleviate post-holiday letdown.
15. Ignore people who want to tell you what you "should" do for the holiday. Listen to yourself, trust yourself, communicate with your family and do what works for you.
16. Remember that crying is okay. The holidays are everywhere; the simplest things may trigger tears.
17. If you are stressed about making the holiday dinner, ask someone else to cook or have the dinner catered.
18. Surround yourself with supportive, comforting people who encourage you to be yourself and help you accept your feelings.
19. Don't send holiday cards this year if it is too sad or overwhelming.
20. Adopt a furry companion—or just volunteer at the humane society if you don't want the 24/7 responsibility!
21. Eat well and move your body. Don't numb yourself with junk food. If you don't have much of an appetite, eat healthy foods in small portions. Moving your body will also help you to clear your head and be in the present moment.
22. Eliminate unnecessary stress. Do not overextend yourself.
23. Be tolerant of your physical and psychological limits.
24. Seek gratitude. Try to find one thing to be grateful for each day. Write it down or photograph it.
25. Communicate ahead of time to ensure that everyone is in agreement about holiday traditions and plans.
26. Light a candle in your home in memory of the person you've lost.
27. Let your perfectionism go. If you always have the perfect tree, perfectly wrapped gifts and perfect table, accept that this year may not be perfect, and that's okay.
28. Talk to children about the holidays. Include them in activities, and let them know it is okay to enjoy the holiday and it is okay to be sad.
29. Treat yourself—splurge on a gift for you. You deserve it.
30. Practice self-care. Make some quiet time for yourself. The holidays can be hectic. Try journaling, meditating or listening to music.
31. Prior to the holidays, proactively identify members of your support system and have them on speed dial.
32. Ask for help. This can be hard if it isn't your style, but it is important. Asking others to help with cooking, shopping or decorating can be a relief.
33. Prioritize and don't over-commit. The holidays are filled with so many parties, dinners and events; save your energy for those that are most important. Look at everything you have to do, and rank the activities in order of importance and skip the rest.
34. Remember, it is okay to be happy. Happiness does not minimize your love for your deceased loved one. Do not feel guilty for feeling joy this holiday season—your loved one would want you to be happy.



# Holiday planner

Use this simple questionnaire to help organize holiday tasks and reduce the mental overload often associated with 'what needs to be done.' Adjust the lists to fit your own needs.

Holiday job list WHAT choices do I have?	Do you know WHY you do it?	Does it matter WHERE you do it?	Does it matter WHEN it is done?	Does it matter HOW it is done?	Does it matter WHO does it?	Do you want to change it?
The family meal						
Religious services						
Traveling						
Gift giving family/friends						
Gift shopping						
Giving to charities						
Cards						
Decorating inside/outside						
Cleaning						
Baking/cooking						
Entertaining (at your home)						
Family gatherings						
School/office parties						
Visiting others						
Taking children to holiday programs						
Holiday clean-up						
Other						
Other						
Other						
Other						

# Things to consider \*

## New traditions or rituals

- Light a special candle symbolizing the loved one you lost and a light for the path ahead of you.
- Give a special gift or donation in memory of your loved one.
- Give a picture of your loved one to others who also miss him or her.
- Have a movie marathon with your loved one's favorite movies.
- Ask some family or friends to volunteer with you to serve dinner at a church or mission.
- Go to a restaurant for the holiday meal rather than preparing a big meal at home.
- Create a new holiday tradition with children that includes the memory of your loved one.

## Activities to share with others

- Make an ornament to put on the tree every year.
- Spend a day baking your loved one's favorite holiday goodies.
- Make a special collage or memory book to display during the holidays.
- Drive around and look at Christmas lights. Discuss which ones would have been your loved one's favorites.

## Alternatives to shopping for gifts

- Do your shopping online.
- Keep things simple—purchase gift cards/gift certificates.
- Ask yourself—are gifts really necessary?
- Don't exchange gifts—encourage everyone to treat themselves instead.
- Make a donation in honor of the gift recipient.
- Share a special picture or story of your loved one.

## Accept your emotions and be patient with yourself

- Say to yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" not "How should I be feeling?"
- Don't expect miracles overnight. Have compassion for yourself, your children and your family. Grief takes time.
- Help yourself and others through support groups. Seeking others who are bereaved takes some of the social pressure off you.
- Ask others to tell you if they start to feel sad and give yourself permission to share your feelings as well.

## Escaping into loneliness is different from being alone

- Do you think your grief should be private and therefore you shouldn't "intrude" on others? Is it easier to sit at home and stare at the walls?
- There is a fine line between escaping and needing some private time. You need a balance—not too much, not too little.
- Friends are important. Reach out. Martyrdom is not a necessary part of the grief process.

*Even though I can't see you,*

*I know you're still with me...*

*You will forever twinkle in every light*

