



# Loneliness and Loss During the Holidays

When distance and circumstance prevent us from being with those we love during the holidays, we may find ourselves sad and lonely. If we've lost someone close to us, the holidays will likely feel less bright. When others are celebrating, we may experience resentment, anxiety, emptiness and grief. How can we manage these normal reactions and find ways to soothe our sadness? Here are a few suggestions that may help you get by.

## Don't Pretend

Rather than putting on a "happy face" when you aren't feeling so merry, give yourself permission to feel your emotional truth. Acknowledging what you feel allows you to express and release painful emotions so that you don't carry the weight of them around. In fact, a recent survey found that 31% of adults in the U.S. have reported experiencing loneliness during the holidays. You're not the only one feeling like you're missing out on what you're "supposed" to feel during this time of year. To help, try writing a letter to the ones you won't be with. Letting go is easier once you have put a name on a feeling. "I will really miss seeing you this season." This can open a discussion of ways to connect without being physically together.

## Be Gentle with Yourself

If a loved one has died this year, you may feel especially vulnerable. As many as 35% of people deal with grief during the holiday season to the point of dreading that time each year. Take things day by day. You will have some better days and can reach out to others when you have the energy. You have the right to change your mind. Ask for what you need. You'll be surprised how others will include you and how taking part in small ways may ease your sadness.

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Over 30% of adults in the U.S. report feeling lonely during the holidays.

AARP Foundation Survey

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## You Have Choices

While many families in the U.S. celebrate traditions that were passed down to them, 18% say they've adopted their own. When loss or circumstance changes how we spend the holidays, it can be an opportunity to create new traditions. What feels appropriate is different for each of us. What brings you peace? How can you honor a loved one who is no longer with you? Who do you know that has been through what you are facing now? Consider talking with them about their experience.

## We Grieve Because We Loved

This doesn't make our pain easier, but it does help us see some reason. While the person is gone, the love isn't. We can manage to journey from grief to gratitude, however long it takes. We don't have to take the journey alone — reach out for help from a friend, family member or professional. We can look forward to a time when we will again find joy in celebrating with others.

## #HopeForTheHolidays #StressLess

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health this holiday season, contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line by texting **MHA** to 741-741.

