

Grief at the Holidays

An interactive companion
for a season of loss

Reflections and small activities.



About this guide

Prepared by
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For personal reflection and everyday
support during loss.

Educational references use .gov and .edu
domains. Activities and artwork are original.

Room for your kind of loss

Grief can follow a death, a separation, a change in health, or the loss of a home or role.

You may also miss the future you expected.

CHOOSE YOUR WAY IN

Read, try an activity, or simply pause. Use your phone's notes or a screenshot to record anything you want to keep.

AT YOUR OWN PACE

Everything is optional. There is no timer, score, or need to finish.

A page for the moment you're in

Read Reflections throughout.

Notice Check in 5. Hunts 7, 21, 22.

Play Puzzles 11, 31, 32.
Answers 42, 43, 44.

Make Playlist 17. Words 28.
A note 35.

Choose Plans 9, 26, 37, 38.
39, 40. Connections 14.

Words Affirmations 12, 34.
A pause on 25.

More support 41. Sources 45, 46, 47.

An arrival check-in

Choose a word, a short sentence, or
leave a prompt open.

Today's date...

What I'm carrying...

One thing I could use...

A few words are enough.

The holiday you're actually having

Something has changed.

You may be missing a person, a relationship, a place, or the life you expected. Familiar plans may need to change, too.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose one holiday expectation to reconsider. You might shorten a visit or ask someone to make plans with you.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

"I'm making different plans this year. I'll let you know what works for me."

A familiar thing nearby

From where you are, notice or recall any one of these.

Something familiar

A mug or a book.

A comfortable texture

Something you can touch or imagine.

A sign of ordinary life

A plant or a familiar sound.

Noticing one thing is enough for this page.

Before the invitations arrive

An invitation may bring comfort, pressure, or both. Consider what joining would involve, including travel and how you will get home.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Decide what would make one gathering manageable. You might plan a shorter visit and your own ride home.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’d like to come for a little while. I’ll make my own travel plans.”

Keep, change, or leave open

Choose one holiday expectation.
Decide which column fits it today.

KEEP	CHANGE	LEAVE OPEN
Something to continue	Something to adjust	Something to decide later

My expectation...

My choice for today...

When a tradition hurts

A familiar ritual may feel comforting or painful this year. If someone has died, you might want to remember them quietly or with others.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose one tradition to keep, change, or pause. If you want, include a photo or a favorite recipe.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’d like to do this differently this year. We can decide again next time.”

A small word search

**REST, CARE, HELP,
WARM, PAUSE**

Look across or down. Each word reads forward. Find one or several.

R	E	S	T	L	P
M	C	A	R	E	A
H	B	N	O	D	U
E	W	A	R	M	S
L	T	G	I	B	E
P	O	F	C	Y	N

You can trace the letters with your eyes.
[Answers are on page 42.](#)

An affirmation for today

**I can make room
for what I need
today.**

If these words fit, keep them in your notes or choose one word to carry into your day.

When the relationship has changed

Someone can be alive and absent from your life. You may miss what you shared, or the relationship you hoped you could have.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Consider what contact, if any, feels appropriate for you. You can leave a message unanswered while you decide.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

"I'm keeping my plans private. I'm not discussing that relationship today."

A small connection map

Write one name or place beside any prompt that fits.

Someone I can ask...

A place I can turn to...

One message I could send...

One name or place is enough.

When home is somewhere else

A move or the loss of a home can change the season. You may miss familiar streets, neighbors, or the place where everyone used to gather.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Bring one familiar thing into your day, such as a song or a recipe. A small reminder can be enough for today.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’m missing home. Would you share a familiar story with me?”

A small memory page

Choose a person, place, or part of life you want to remember. A single detail is enough.

One detail I want to keep...

A sound, a phrase, or an ordinary moment.

One way to carry it...

A sentence in your notes or a familiar song.

You can keep this private.

A personal playlist

Choose a familiar song for any one of these moments. Silence can be your choice, too.

Something familiar

An artist or song you already know.

Something you enjoy

Music you want to hear today.

Something for later

A song to return to another day.

Stop or switch songs whenever you want.

When your health has changed

A change in health or ability may change how you take part. You may miss an old role, even while finding ways to join in now.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Ask about one thing you need before agreeing to plans, such as seating, accessible entry, or a shorter visit.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’d like to join you. I need to know whether the space will work for me.”

When work or money has changed

Losing work or financial stability can affect both your plans and your sense of who you are. Gift exchanges may feel different this year.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose a spending limit before replying to holiday plans. You can suggest a visit without a gift exchange.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’m keeping spending simple this year. Could we meet without exchanging gifts?”

The future you thought you'd have

You may be grieving a life you expected to be living by now. Other people's announcements can bring that difference into focus.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose how you want to receive updates today. You might step away from a feed and check in with someone you trust.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

"I care about you. I may need some space around this topic right now."

A quiet scavenger hunt

Notice or recall any one. You can stay where you are.

One color

Notice or remember a color you enjoy.

One pattern

Look for a stripe or a repeating shape.

One point of comfort

Find or picture something you would like nearby.

You can notice one thing and stop.

A small comfort collection

Look for something you already have. Notice it, picture it, or make a short list.

A useful thing

Something that makes a task easier.

A familiar thing

Something linked to an ordinary routine.

A pleasing detail

A texture, color, or shape you enjoy.

You can keep the collection in your notes.

When the questions are difficult

A question at the table may reach into something private. You can choose what to share, even when someone asks with good intentions.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Prepare one short reply. Ask a trusted person to help change the subject if you would find that useful.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’m keeping that private. I’d be glad to talk about something else.”

When grief catches you by surprise

A song, a smell, or an ordinary moment may bring grief close again. A difficult moment can happen even after a more settled stretch.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Pause before deciding what comes next. You might step somewhere quieter or ask a trusted person to sit with you.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“Something brought up my grief. I need a few minutes. Can you stay nearby?”

A place
to pause

You can stop here.

You can return to this guide
whenever you want.

**One page can be
a complete visit.**

A gentle choice grid

Choose any square that fits today.
One square is enough.

Have water	Listen to one song	Notice one color
Ask for company	Pause here	Write one line
Change one plan	Find something familiar	Keep time for rest

Today I choose...

When joy shows up too

You might laugh and then feel sad.
Relief may sit beside longing.
Different feelings can share a day,
and you can give each some room.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

If you enjoy a moment, allow yourself to stay with it. Later, you can write down what felt good and what you missed.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I enjoyed that moment, and I’m still grieving. Both are part of today.”

A word collection

Keep a word that fits, or replace it with your own word beginning with the same letter.

C Company

A Ask

R Rest

E Ease

One word I want to keep...

When you want quiet or company

You may want time alone and still want someone to remember you. A short, familiar connection may suit you better than a crowded gathering.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose one person to contact. Make a small, specific request, such as a ten-minute call or a quiet walk.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I’m having a quiet day. Could we talk for ten minutes this evening?”

When loss is still unfolding

Illness or an uncertain future can bring grief before a death. You may feel pressure to make a holiday especially meaningful while also carrying care duties.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose one task to simplify or share. Ask the person receiving care what they would like, when possible.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“I want time together. Could you handle the meal so I can be present?”

A little word play

Put the letters in order. Each answer is a word you can use when making holiday plans.

A U S P E

Take a little time before deciding.

L H E P

Ask someone to share one task.

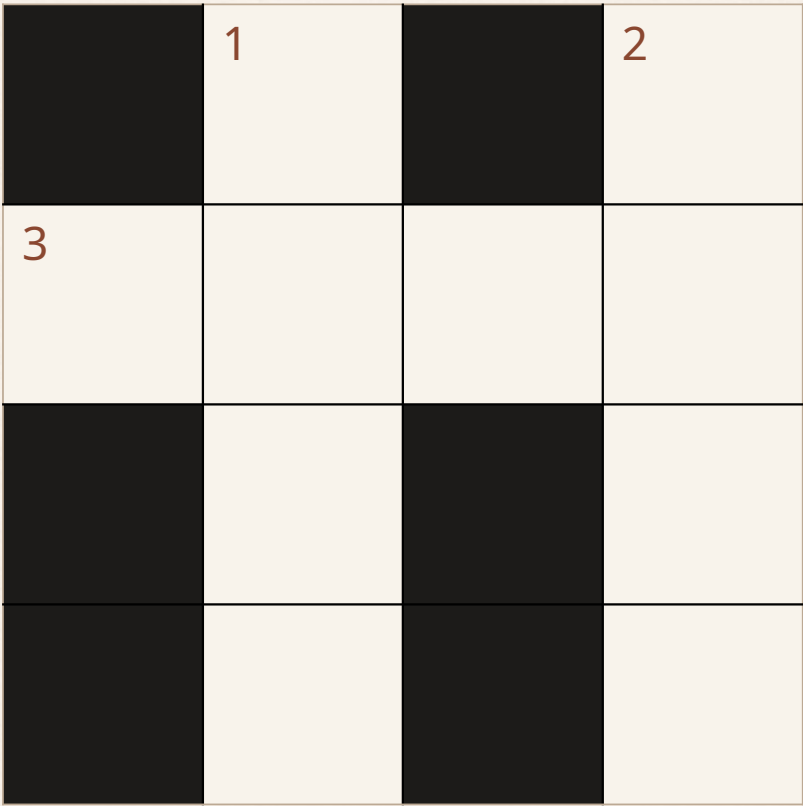
T E S R

Make room for a quiet break.

Solve one if you like. [Answers are on page 43.](#)

A mini crossword

Use the clues to fill the open squares.
[Answers are on page 44.](#)



3 Across: A quiet break (4).

1 Down: Support you can ask for (4).

2 Down: One small action (4).

When you're supporting someone

Let the person decide how much to share. Their loss may be private, and what helps today may be different from what helped last time.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Offer one specific form of help and room to decline. Ask before sharing their story or posting a photo.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

"Would a meal or a short visit help? It's okay to say neither."

Words you can keep

Choose a sentence that fits, or write
your own.

I can ask for company.

I can change a plan.

I can enjoy a moment.

My words for today...

A note to yourself

Write a few lines as you would to someone you care about.

Dear me,

I want you to remember...

Today, you can...

With care, ...

After the celebration ends

The quiet afterward may feel welcome or lonely. You can make room for that part of the day before everyone leaves.

ONE SMALL CHOICE

Choose one familiar routine for afterward. Arrange a check-in if you would like company once the gathering ends.

WORDS YOU CAN BORROW

“Could you check in tomorrow? I’d appreciate hearing from you.”

One gentle thing to do

Choose what would support you today. Adapt any idea to your needs.

Have something to drink.

Make your next meal simpler.

Keep a familiar bedtime.

Ask for help with one task.

Your own idea counts, too.

A plan for this holiday

Write a few words in your phone's notes. Leave room to change your mind.

I would like...

One thing I want to keep.

I can change...

One expectation I want to adjust.

I can ask...

A person and one specific request.

Afterward...

A routine or check-in for later.

A request in your own words

Complete one sentence in your notes, or say it aloud to yourself.

Today I could use...

Could you help me with...

Please check in with me...

I can make one specific request.

A brief field note

Save a few words you may want to revisit. You can use these prompts another day.

Date...

One thing that helped...

One thing to adjust...

One choice for next time...

When you want more support

If distress is making daily life difficult, a health care provider or licensed mental health professional can help.

You can ask a trusted person to help you find care or make an appointment.

SUPPORT IN THE UNITED STATES

For emotional distress or a crisis:

[Call 988](#)

[Text 988](#)

You can reach out for emotional support even without thoughts of suicide.

Word search: the answers

[For the puzzle on page 11.](#)

Rows start at the top.

Columns start at the left.

REST Row 1, columns 1–4.
Read to the right.

CARE Row 2, columns 2–5.
Read to the right.

HELP Rows 3–6, column 1.
Read downward.

WARM Row 4, columns 2–5.
Read to the right.

PAUSE Rows 1–5, column 6.
Read downward.

One found word is a complete try.

Word play: the answers

For the puzzle on page 31.

A U S P E = PAUSE

“I’d like a little time to decide.”

L H E P = HELP

“Could you share this task with me?”

T E S R = REST

“I’m making room for a quiet break.”

One word I could use today...

Mini crossword: the answers

[For the mini crossword on page 32.](#)

	H		S
R	E	S	T
	L		E
	P		P

3 Across: REST

1 Down: HELP

2 Down: STEP

Sources for understanding loss

CDC

cdc.gov

Grief

Public health guidance on different kinds of loss, daily routines, and seeking support.

Cornell University

fsap.cornell.edu

Non-Death Loss and Grief

A university assistance program's guidance on changes in health, identity, relationships, and expectations.

Sources checked October 26, 2026

Sources for the holiday season

Ohio State University

health.osu.edu

[Coping with grief during the holidays](#)

Clinical psychologist Kristen Carpenter, PhD, discusses traditions, remembrance, and asking for help.

Stanford University

studentaffairs.stanford.edu

[Grief Over the Holidays: Five Recommendations](#)

Psychologist Helen Hsu offers guidance on mixed feelings, rest, and community care.

Sources checked October 26, 2026

Sources for care and connection

NIH News in Health

newsinhealth.nih.gov

[Navigating Grief](#)

An NIH overview of grief research, flexible coping, everyday care, and professional support.

University of Nebraska Medical Center

unmc.edu

[Take care: Managing grief during the holidays](#)

Clinical psychologist Cecilia Poon, PhD, addresses anticipatory grief and flexible holiday plans.

Activities are original creative prompts.

You can decide again

What fits this holiday may change.

You can keep what helps and
reconsider what does not. You can
ask for support along the way.

**For today,
one small choice
is enough.**