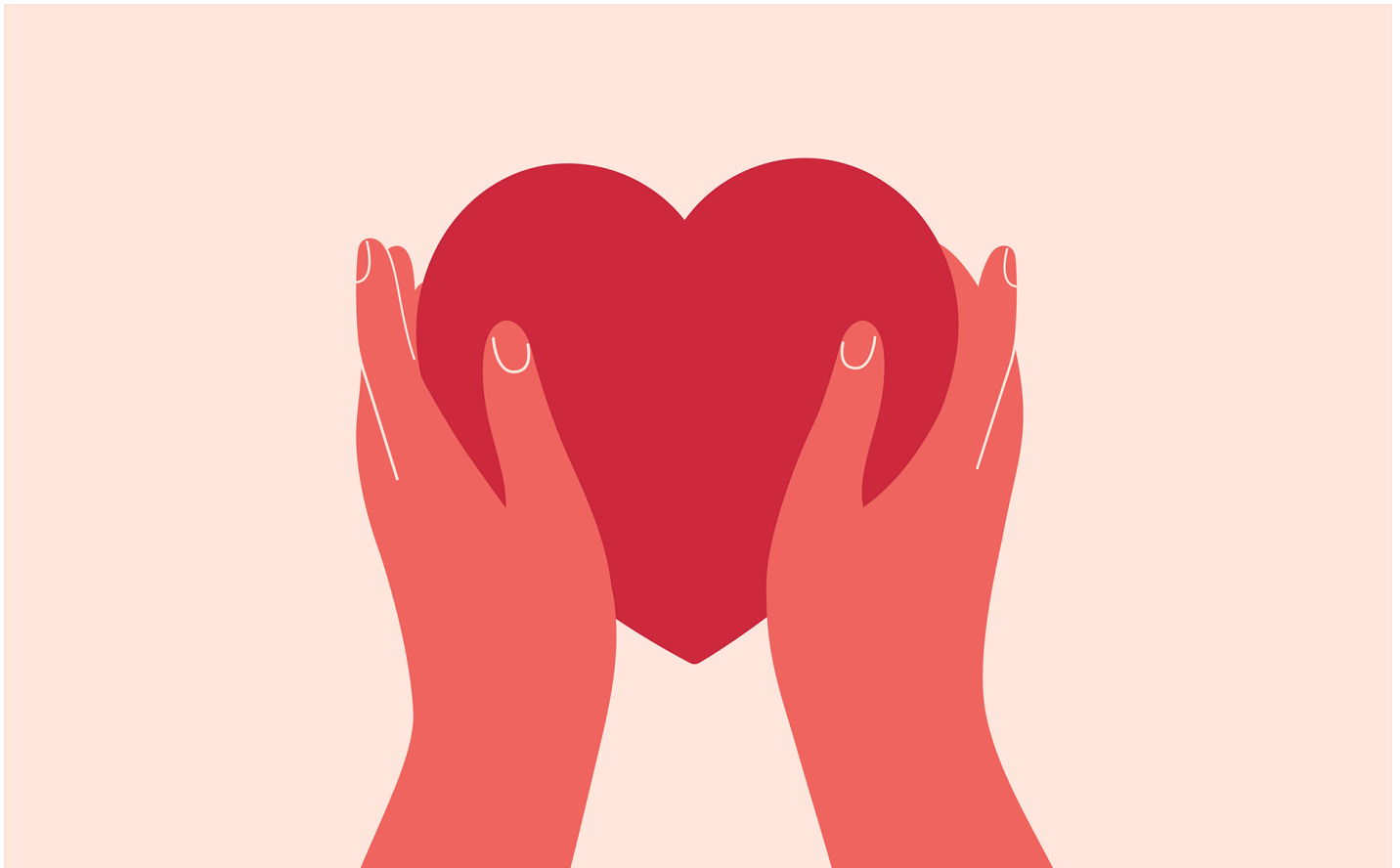


When Grief Hits During the Holidays

Grief often hits the hardest during holidays and special events. Although the pain is unavoidable, we can support ourselves by making space for it, finding connection, and being kind to ourselves.

BY [ELAINE SMOOKLER](#) | DECEMBER 23, 2023 | [GRIEF & LOSS](#)



When you are grieving something—the death of a loved one, the end of a job, the loss of anything that reminds you that life will never be the same again—holidays and special events can really be a knock in the chops.

What can you do when those around you are in high spirits and all you want to do is slink into a dark hole?

It's natural that you don't want to feel pain, which includes emotional pain. [Judson Brewer](#), addiction specialist and neuroscientist, noted that even sea slugs, with the most basic nervous system available to support life, move away from what they experience as negative, and towards what they experience as positive.

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So it's OK: you're not just scared and in denial, you're responding to genetic programming that is designed to move you away from pain. And since loss is inevitable, at some point you will have nowhere left to escape. However, it's not all bad news, because [this terrible moment](#) can be the springboard you use to train yourself to meet the inescapably horrible, with a bravery that leads to freedom.

Oh yes, you can.

1. Give Yourself Space

The first step in generating the kind of bravery needed: *give yourself some space*.

Now don't get me wrong, it might feel awful to hang out in the less-busy. The silence might feel like you're marinating in battery acid. That's why it takes courage. To the best

what happens if you experiment with letting the stormy sensations be felt for two minutes, without trying to fix or change anything?

2. Explore What's Here Right Now

If you've never experienced being anchored, do a bit of exploring. For instance, right now do you feel most stable and calm when you focus on your feet? Your seat? Your hands? Or maybe it feels most restful to give your attention to the sensations of breathing in the nose, mouth or throat, the rise and fall of the belly or the rib cage expanding and contracting? Take your time. What gives you the greatest sense of landing, even if it's just for right now?

You are learning to create stability by finding it within. That's step one of how to cope when you are t-boned by grief.

Once you have found some connection to stability, you might still be in a challenging social or business situation where you are trying to act in a way sometimes called "normal."

3. Find Connection

Hey, guess what? It turns out that grief is not something that many people love to talk about. When you're grieving, all kinds of emotional gloom can tend to ooze out everywhere. You may not know what to say to anyone and they might not know what to say to you. Awkward. And yes, you are a buzzkill. Unless you happen to meet someone in these situations who has also experienced a loss that's hit them hard, or someone who's been through what you're going through and so can relate with empathy. Then suddenly you have found your twin flame. The person who knows what you mean when you say you feel like you are being eaten by fire-ants or shares your understanding that neither of you would ever kill yourselves, but at times, you can't quite remember why not. And sometimes you will have to be the one who stands with you, telling yourself, "I know what you're going through, pal. You're doing OK." Make sure you never let go of you, no matter what.

less like an alien.

This step is about finding connection. Finding it within yourself, and also with others who have experienced loss and can't (or don't want to) mask their pain. You might stumble upon these people because of your own openness, or you could seek out a grief group. Connecting with others who don't try to talk you out of your pain can go a long way to helping you feel a little less like an alien.

4. Be Kind To You

Another important way to help yourself manage the grief minefields is to be kinder to yourself than you ever have been in your life. No kidding around, be gentle and understanding with yourself.

That might look like letting yourself be quiet, even if that's not your regular mode. Or maybe you need to nap more. Getting out for a walk. Even plugging in to video games or podcasts can give you places to relax your mind. Just check in and notice: do you feel nourished by your choices, or do they leave you feeling depleted? Look for what makes you feel better—more rested, more connected, more at ease. Those kinds of acts of self-kindness.

You can activate bravery by slowing down and feeling what's hitting you, connecting with others who can support you, and being gentle with yourself as you travel to places you may never have wanted to go, but can't avoid.

It may feel like everything comfortable and familiar has been detonated into smithereens. And maybe it has! So try not to freak, honey, but probably no one can save you from feeling whatever you feel.

avoid. How long will the hurt last? Way longer than you want it to, but you can find the courage to use everything that comes your way, even the sensations of grief, to bust open into newness!

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