



HOLIDAY RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Rituals and traditions serve a variety of purposes. Rituals can be a powerful tool for fostering meaning, communal identity, belonging, and a sense of purpose. **Rituals are really important.**

The holiday season is a very busy time of the year for many people. It is easy to rush into the holidays without much thought or intention behind rituals or traditions. For many grieving families, it can be especially hard to celebrate old rituals and traditions without their person who died. Because rituals and traditions are so linked to the people we celebrate them with, when a person dies that ritual will inevitably feel very different.

This tip sheet will help you navigate through the planning, conversations, and chaos that you experience during the holiday season.

1 START WITH YOU

Check in with yourself first and ask, “What rituals and traditions will help me this holiday season? Which ones am I dreading?” Write them down and make a list. Start here because your thoughts and feelings about rituals and traditions will serve as a filter for all future discussions and decisions with others.

2 ENGAGE YOUR FAMILY

Next, go to members of your immediate family. Ask them to make their own list, and be honest about what rituals and traditions feel important to keep or change now that your person has died. What are they looking forward to? What are they dreading or wanting to change?

3 COMPARE LISTS

Set up an intentional time when the whole family is not distracted by homework, TV, or other people. Ask everyone to come ready to talk about the upcoming holidays. Invite everyone to share the things they are looking forward to, and the things they are dreading. What rituals and traditions from past years do they want to keep, and what do they want to change?

4 EVERYONE NEEDS TO FEEL HEARD

Remember that filter we talked about before? This is where it comes into play. If a member of your family has different expectations from you about the upcoming holidays, that is okay. Really try to listen and understand *first*, rather than to try to *change* their perspective. The goal here is for everyone to feel heard and understood so that you can find a way forward together.



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5 COMPROMISE

It is not always possible to fulfill everyone's holiday needs. There may be some conflicting needs within your own family, and that's okay. Try to communicate clearly and work towards compromise together.

6 REMEMBER, CHANGE IS HARD

As our teens say, "death sucks," and change is always hard. Remember, you are having to make some of these tough decisions because death is completely out of your control. With that in mind, be flexible and compassionate toward yourself and others around you as you adjust to these changes.

7 THE GOAL IS CONNECTION

No matter what rituals and traditions you choose to keep this holiday season, try and center them on creating a meaningful connection with your loved ones. At the end of the day, one of the lessons that death teaches us all is that life is short, and the people we love are what matter most.