



# Coping with Holidays and Special Days

A report from the Surviving Christmas Talk  
Given for TCF members by Peter Kadwell  
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There are 3 important points when attending talks such as these.

1. **Confidentiality:** It is important that people feel safe to express themselves freely, knowing that what they say will stay in the room.
2. **Sharing:** It is important to share experiences and avoid 'advice' giving. Our grief is unique and what may work well for us may not be appropriate or relevant for someone else.
3. **Understanding:** Your reality may not be mine. It is important to assume a non-judgemental position in listening to others. The loss of a child/ren is an experience 'Beyond Words' and we are all doing the best we can to survive and simply need respect and understanding.

There are two kinds of grievors: Intuitive grievors tend to experience the loss deeply, feel overwhelming sorry and are generally more emotionally expressive of their grief. These people will want to talk about their feelings, cry and lament. Instrumental grievors, who also experience loss deeply, will tend to want to 'master' their feelings and be more reluctant to talk about them. They will tend toward wanting to 'problem solve' and find practical ways of expressing their grief. Each has their own validity and need to be respected.

At Christmas in particular, there are those who may want to join in, celebrate and honour what their child would have wanted. And there are those who want to be away from all celebrating. To hide somewhere safe until it is all over. Both attitudes are valid and both need to seek ways to do what they want, and not what others feel they should do. There is no set way of coping. We just have to listen to ourselves and do what seems right for us. Well meaning friends can just be told—this is what I need to do this year. Another year may be different.

**CHRISTMAS CAN STILL BE SPECIAL.** If you are able to and want to keep the Christmas traditions, find a way to do something in memory of your loved one. Light a special candle, hang a ball with their name on the tree, put their photo amongst the decorations, make a toast to the person, buy a special present in their name that all can enjoy. Try to make the day meaningful in some way. Don't be afraid to laugh—it won't make you a traitor to their memory. It is a cliché, but they would want you to be happy.

**IF CELEBRATING IS NOT FOR YOU;** If you decide to stay away from it all, be careful in your choice of "hidey hole!" Find somewhere that you can be alone in, away from all the celebrations. A cruise is a definite no no! But a holiday in a different country where Christmas is not important, can be possible. A country retreat is good, or anywhere peaceful, where you can heal. Being alone for a short while can be therapeutic.

**PLANNING IS IMPORTANT.** Since a large part of the problem is anticipation, decide what you want to do—have a plan, so that when you are asked what you are doing, you have an answer that you are comfortable with.

**REMEMBER—IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO.** You don't need to do things just because you think it's 'expected' of you. Give yourself permission to say 'No'.

**IT'S OKAY TO ENJOY YOURSELF.** But do it your way. If you want to get involved with celebrations, make sure that you have an escape hatch. Some way to be alone for a bit, or leave early if it all becomes too much.

**KEEP IN TOUCH.** Make sure that family or friends who may be affected by your plans are aware of them.

**GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS.** Bottling things up takes energy—find out how you best express your feelings and allow yourself time out. Remember tears are positive. Just let them flow when they need to.

**LOOK AFTER YOURSELF WELL.** Eat sensibly, drink water, exercise, get enough sleep and rest. Avoid using alcohol, drugs or extreme behaviours to cope with your emotions.

**AND REMEMBER—THIS SEASON WILL PASS.**

Jenny Wandl President, TCF NSW.