

BEREAVED AT CHRISTMAS



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For most of us hearing Noddy Holder belt out 'Merry Christmas Everybody' for the 10th time in the run up to Christmas may just be slightly irritating. However, if you have lost someone close during the year, the constant reminder that Christmas, without your loved one, is just around the corner may be a special form of torture. You may wish that Christmas (and Noddy Holder) would just go away.

Christmas can be a difficult time not only for the recently bereaved, but for anyone who has lost a special person a year, or even 10 years earlier. The festive season, after all, is when families and friends get together to celebrate and share happy times. We are supposed to be jolly – ho ho ho and all that! Even the major supermarkets are in on it, their Christmas TV advert extravaganzas bombarding us in our living rooms with the myth of the 'perfect' family and the 'perfect family Christmas'. The end of the year is a natural time for reflection and if you are bereaved, Christmas may highlight the absence of the loved one. It may also provoke complex feelings and bring back memories of Christmases past when you were together. You may be worrying about how you are going to get through it, you may not feel like celebrating or you may feel isolated and left out when those around you are full of festive spirit.

So what can you do to help yourself? The short answer is: whatever works for you. There is no right or wrong way. It might help you to think about the following:

- Look after yourself and cut yourself some slack. Practice some self-care. You have been through a lot. Heightened feelings of loss and sadness are normal at this time. Conversely you may not feel anything at all. That's OK. We all grieve differently. Try to get adequate exercise

and rest and try not to over indulge too much.

- Preparation. Try to work out beforehand what you might want to do over Christmas. Will it work best for you if you carry on as normal maintaining routines and traditions? Would you like to bring your lost loved one into the celebrations in some way? Perhaps you feel you would like to do something completely different over Christmas such as spending time alone or volunteering at a homeless shelter? Whatever you decide to do, be flexible and remember it's OK to change your mind.
- Other family members may want to do things differently from you over Christmas. Respect their choice. Children can be resilient but you may want to ask them how they would like to celebrate this year and whether there is anything they would like to do differently.
- You may need to give yourself permission to enjoy the Christmas festivities. Enjoyment is not a sign that you did not love or miss the bereaved person. It might be helpful to think about what they would want for you?
- Talk to friends and family about how you are feeling. Reach out. Make use of your social networks. Turn to your faith. Seek help from your GP, organisations specialising in loss and bereavement or a professionally trained counsellor if you feel overwhelmed by your feelings. Charities such as the Samaritans are there for support 24 hours a day including Christmas Day. ●

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