

SPECIAL DAYS, HOLIDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Any day in grief can bring unexpected 'waves' of emotion that can often feel destabilizing and catch you off guard. Special days, holidays and anniversaries are common times where grief can feel heightened. Special days may include traditional holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, developmental milestones or even memories that pop up on social media. It can also include specific times during your child's illness, such as a time of a diagnosis, that may trigger unanticipated waves of grief. While each individual approaches these days differently, we hope these tips provide practical guidance on navigating these difficult moments.

Planning for Special Days

- Acknowledge that the day will be different than it has in the past.
- The time leading up to special days may be marked by increased anxiety.
 - Making plans in advance of important days may help ease anticipatory worry.
- Identify people in your circle (family, friends) who you may need to discuss the special day with.
 - Spending these days by yourself, or even part of the day alone, is also OK.
- Consider what feels important to honor your child and their memory on the day itself.
 - For example, some families find comfort in sharing special memories of their child, going to dinner at their child's favorite restaurant, etc.
- Identify which traditions (if any) you would like to keep or create.
- Give yourself permission to change traditions, roles or rituals that no longer feel supportive.
- Remember, it's OK to minimize or "skip" a holiday/special day.
- Involve siblings in forming special day plans.
 - Be sure to ask siblings how they'd like to be greeted by others (hugs, elbow taps, high-fives, etc.).
- After forming a plan, communicate the expectations for the day with your social circle and ask for help.
- Social media memories can be particularly triggering: Be mindful of the time spent on social media.

On the Day

- Be gentle with yourself. The day may not go as planned or you may not feel as anticipated.
- Identify the people/communities/support networks to lean on.
- Always have an 'escape route' – a strategy for taking a break when feeling overwhelmed.
- Schedule silence and quiet time throughout the day.
- Be mindful of over-indulging on food or alcohol.
- Give yourself permission to feel the range of grief emotions.
 - It's OK to find moments of joy. There is room for both laughter and tears.

After the Day

- Allow yourself time to emotionally recover. Special days, holidays and anniversaries can be particularly challenging times for families.
- Know that it's OK if plans were not executed perfectly or changed on the day itself.
- Keeping siblings in predictable routines can help with positive coping.
- Consider what elements of the special day you would keep for next time (and which you would change).
- Remember that you can continue honoring your child each and every day.

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Suggestions and Ideas from Families for Honoring Special Days

It can be difficult to know where to start when planning for special days. Every family has their own cultural, religious, spiritual or non-religious traditions and rituals that are special and meaningful for them. This list of suggestions from other families may help you find a place to begin.

- Encourage your loved ones to speak your child's name and share memories.
- Consider lighting a memorial candle.
- Share a special birthday cake or dessert.
- Make a donation or volunteer in honor of your child.
- Plant a tree or spend time in nature.
- Create a special 'memory box' and encourage loved ones to write letters, memories or stories about your child.
- Play your child's favorite songs or watch their favorite movies.
- Complete a creative project (painting, visual art, scrapbook). Projects can also be supportive to siblings and can be done together as a family.
- Choose a personal belonging of your child's to carry with you.
- Cook a special meal or dish that's special to your child or your family.