

Coping with Difficult Times Following the Death of a Loved One

Objective

To cope with difficult dates and events following the death of a loved one.

What to Know

Certain times of the year can be painful if you have lost a loved one. Examples include holidays, the deceased person's birthday, a wedding anniversary, Mother's or Father's Day, and the date of the death. There might be other special dates or times of year that remind you of your loved one.

Here are some suggestions for coping with these difficult times.

- 1. Anticipate and plan for difficult dates.** You might be able to predict when these dates or times of year will occur. Plan how you want to spend that time so you feel more in control. Make a note about what dates or times are difficult for you and think about what you can do to cope.
- 2. Honor the bond with the person who died.** You can honor the bond you have with the deceased person even while you miss them. You can remember their love and caring, their accomplishments, or other admired traits. Visit the cemetery and place flowers on the grave or honor them with a special ritual.
- 3. Identify pleasurable activities for yourself and loved ones.** Times of celebration or acknowledging a life transition can be difficult, but they are also opportunities to find moments of joy and peace. Allow yourself and your loved ones to experience positive feelings. Share the warmth and love of the people around you and think of things you can enjoy, if possible.
- 4. Take care of yourself – and allow others to help you.** Even if you are prepared, difficult times can still be hard to cope with. They are likely to trigger painful memories or feelings, and you need to care for yourself by lowering your expectations and giving yourself time and permission to feel sad. Maybe you can let someone else host a celebration, plan the party, or prepare the meal. Delegate holiday tasks and accept help from family and friends.

This worksheet will help you identify those difficult times and explore ways you can cope.

What to Do

First, you will identify difficult dates, times of year, or events. On the next page is a chart with examples of times bereaved people find challenging. Think about how you feel on these days and add others that come to mind. Using the following scale, rate how difficult you expect each day or situation to be, from 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, 3 = definitely, and 4 = extremely difficult. Include the specific date, if it applies, and make notes about how you feel and what the day or event brings to mind.

Day or Event	Date	Rating (0-4)	Notes
Death anniversary			
Birthday of deceased			
Your birthday			
Wedding anniversary			
Holidays a. b. c. d.			
Other times a. b. c. d.			

Next, you will plan activities for each difficult time you have identified.

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Now, keep track of the activities you do on these difficult events and days. Write down the date and the activity you did to honor your loved one, cope, or care for yourself. Rate the intensity of your grief on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = none at all, to 10 = the worst grief you can imagine. Describe your emotions and whether the activity helped you cope. Note any thoughts, such as whether you will repeat the activity at some point in the future.

Date	Activity	Intensity of grief (0-10)	Emotions	Did the activity help you cope? Y / N	Thoughts

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you cope with difficult dates and events following the death of your loved one? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
