

## Some Tips to Share with Clients Experiencing Holiday Grief



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Ever wonder why the holidays fall during autumn and winter? The reasons include holdovers from ancient customs and the seasonal nature of agricultural work. Putting that aside, though, there's something ironic yet oddly fitting about choosing the darkest, coldest time of year to make merry, as those who are grieving can understand. As a counselor, this time of year sees many clients who just can't seem to find holiday cheer amidst the grief of losing a loved one. Navigating grief during the holidays is challenging, but we'd like to offer some tips for you to share with your clients dealing with loss and grief this season.

### Tip #1: Rewrite the Script

Traditions can connect them with their heritage and give them a much-needed sense of stability. On the other hand, they can keep them tied to past hurts when they want nothing more than to move on. If your client is open to it, suggest that they [start over fresh](#) this season. For example, they could splurge on a getaway instead of staying close to home. They may decide to stay in this year and cozy up by the fire with some [holiday movies](#) that will make them laugh. Or maybe they'll enjoy the sight of their neighbor's holiday lights this year if they opt out of putting up their own. Breaking up old patterns while holding memories dear can help them to close this chapter of life and start afresh.

## Tip #2: Leave

Holidays come with their fair share of holiday parties, but for clients dealing with loss, a party is often the last thing they feel like doing. Forcing themselves to stay longer at holiday parties than they'd like will do neither them nor anyone else [any good](#), as pointed out by Huffington Post. However, they may feel an obligation to stay and put on a happy face. Let them know that it's okay to call it a night if they need to. There is no need to invent a reason. Just excuse themselves and bow out. True friends and loved ones will understand.

## Tip #3: Honor the Person's Memory

Denying their loss can hinder their grieving process. Why not incorporate the memory of their loved one into their seasonal rituals instead? They could [light a candle](#) in her memory, add an ornament to the tree with her in mind, or donate to a worthy cause in her name. As paradoxical as it may sound, focusing on the person they lost can sometimes help them move forward. Brainstorm [ideas](#) with them, or have them come up with some of their own before the next session.

## Tip #4: Forget Being Perfect

Sometimes people think of grief as a time when they must remain strong, even impassive in the face of loss. But, while this may sound admirable, in reality it will only prolong the mourning process. So, remind your client that their emotions and behavior will change, sometimes from one second to the next. It's okay to cry, vent their anger, and even break things on occasion. Grief is a journey with countless stops along the way, some less trying than others, but all of them challenging. As their therapist, you are here to guide them along this journey, through the ups and the many downs.

## Tip #5: Never Punish Yourself

The temptation for your client to punish themselves for the loss of their loved one can [seem overwhelming](#) at times, as explained by the American Cancer Society. You may find that during sessions you find them falling into the "if only" trap: "If only I had pushed her to exercise more;" "If only I had driven that night;" "If only I had made her see the doctor sooner." But there's no way to undo what has happened. Learning from genuine past mistakes is vital for their well-being, but reliving events about which they can do nothing, or trying to find fault where none exists, won't help. Help them stay away from that trap.

## Tip #6: Realize that "Normal" Grief is an Illusion

You may find your client asking you about the "normal" grieving process. This falsity comes from well-meaning people who say that the "normal" grieving process lasts six months to a year. This claim is untrue. There's [no set time](#) for how long grief should last. Avoid labeling their grief with a stage or timeline, as this only adds stress if they are progressing at a slower rate than John or

Susan. Their emotions are just that - their emotions, no one else's. Accepting this simple fact can help spare them endless anguish.

The holidays will pass into a new year, one with fresh opportunities for happiness and healing. Help your clients work through their grief, and make what they can of the season while keeping their eyes focused on what's ahead. Here's wishing you and those you are helping all the best in the times to come.

Lucille Rosetti