

# How Do We Face Valentine's Day When Someone We Love Has Died?

## A February Tip Sheet



The calendar turns another month, and here is February staring at us. We've just regrouped from the holiday season and the New Year, only to confront yet another reminder of the loss of our loved one. For some, Valentine's Day itself may not stir up much grief, but themes that relate to it — love, relationship, togetherness — can be hard to handle when grieving the loss of a loved one

We can take steps, however, to nurture our hearts during this holiday and help ease the pain of our grief.

### **Feeling Overwhelmed?**

First, we need to acknowledge how we are feeling and talk about our feelings with someone we can trust, someone who can really listen. We might call a therapist, counselor, minister, rabbi, or other faith practitioner; attend a bereavement support group; etc. We need to be gentle with ourselves, practice good self-care, and remember we are grieving in just the right way for us.

If we are not sure whether what we're feeling is "normal," and especially if we're not eating or sleeping well, are crying uncontrollably, or are unable to manage basic activities of daily living, we need to recognize that our grief has become overwhelming and we need help. Call your local bereavement manager who can help further explore what you are feeling and can make recommendations for grief resources and support.

### **Reminders of Love**

Even if our distress is not acute, an event like Valentine's Day can still take the wind out of our sails. This holiday often brings back memories of our loved one and reminds us of the void we feel without them. One woman described it this way:

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*“My mom died 10 years ago after a slow decline into Alzheimer’s. She’s been on my mind a lot lately. I got one of her rings restored as a gift to myself so I could carry a bit of her wherever I went. As time passes and changes happen in my life, I wish she were here to comfort and reassure me. Valentine’s was a day she always gifted me with some ‘from-me-to-you’ reminder of her love. Now she gifts me during my quiet time, when I imagine her and think about her. I hear familiar words from her echo in me. I find I continue to be loved and companioned by her.”*

There are ways to help ourselves on Valentine’s Day when we are grieving the loss of a loved one. First, it helps to anticipate not whether, but *how* grief will show up, and have a plan in place to manage it. It also helps to remember that we might be surprised ... Sometimes the anticipation of the holiday is worse than the day itself!

### Here are some practical tips on managing Valentine’s Day grief:

- Write a letter to your loved one.
- Light a candle or buy a bouquet of roses in honor of him or her.
- Gift yourself with a special Valentine’s present, maybe flowers or chocolates.
- Make a special meal with someone where you can share memories of your loved one.
- Look at photo albums and reminisce.
- Soothe yourself with music, prayer, uplifting literature, tears, and laughter.
- Make a list of the ways your loved one enriched your life and continues to influence you.
- Visit favorite places from your life with your loved one and savor the memories. Do something your loved one enjoyed.
- Surround yourself with people who love and support you.
- Draw comfort from doing for others. Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of our loved one.



The most important thing to remember is: There is no right or wrong way to celebrate Valentine’s Day after the death of a loved one. The best way to cope is to plan ahead, get support from others, take care of ourselves, and experience whatever emotions arise — be it joy, sadness, anger — to allow ourselves to fully grieve.

**Special days like Valentine’s Day play a role in helping us keep the memories of our loved ones alive.**

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