



20 Messages for Suicide Loss Survivors During the Holidays

When you lose someone to suicide, everything can feel different. Even (and maybe especially) traditions and customs you've learned to look forward to can feel strange and "not right" without your loved one. During the holidays, this means figuring out what kind of "new normal" works for you. Maybe you relish in these old traditions because they remind you of your loved one. Maybe doing classic holiday activities without them feels like too much, and you'd rather do something different — or not do anything at all.

However you're choosing to spend the holidays this year after losing someone to suicide, we want you to know there is no wrong way to grieve. To get some insight from people who've been there, we asked survivors to share one message or piece of advice they would tell someone who's spending the holidays without their loved ones.

Save the Dates:
Step Forward to Prevent Suicide Walks
Brookings – April 21, 2018
Sioux Falls – June 2018
Yankton – August 4, 2018

**Here's what they had to say.
We're sending you all love.**

1. "Just breathe. If you need to excuse yourself and have a few moments alone, then do it. I like to talk about my brother a lot during a holiday. I like to think about what he would be doing if he were there. It works well for me but may not work well for someone else. Do what feels right for you!" — Ronni W.
2. "We skipped Christmas Day last year, and it was amazing. If you really think about it, it's just another day. Not any sadder than the day before or the day after." — Jenifer D.
3. "I enjoy the family time. It's something about the togetherness to get you through the tough time! As a suicide loss survivor, I have opened my eyes to life! Enjoy life, and love love love! My boys and I like to tell stories about their daddy, and we talk about what an amazing person he was. The first year Brandon was gone, my boys and I didn't do the holiday thing. I know that sounds like a contradiction to what I just said, but the firsts are the hardest. It was hard to put a smile on. So we went to the cemetery and had a breakfast out there. I guess what I'm trying to say is, do what makes you feel better. What's good for you may not be what's good for someone else!" — Candice B.
4. "Don't ever let anyone tell you how to grieve. There's no right or wrong answer. Just human, individual responses. — Don K.
5. It's OK to be sad. It's OK to cry. It's OK to cry at Christmas dinner. But try to remember memories of your loved on those days. I lost my dad December 22, and that Christmas was the hardest — every holiday season is hard. But I choose to remember his impatience on opening presents and his love

of deer hunting. Surround yourself with your loved ones, but don't be afraid to take a minute or an hour or even a day to yourself." — Vicky P.

6. "I lost my brother December 20, 2002, so the holidays are especially sensitive for me. What I would say to someone newly grieving is to allow themselves to feel however they feel. You don't need to subscribe to anyone else's timeline to appease their comfort. Take the time *you* need to get through the holiday. If you have young children, as I did at the time of my loss, don't be afraid to let them see you cry, it gives them permission to cry too — and those tears carry so much healing. Sending hugs and love your way, it never goes away, but I promise it gets softer." — Sue K.
7. "You do what you need to survive the holidays. Do as little or as much as you want/need to do. You don't have to justify your actions or decisions to anybody. The first Christmas without my son (this is my 11th), I purchased all new blue and silver ornaments in honor of him. Blue is his favorite color. So every year I put up *his* tree." — Tina S.
8. "I skipped last Christmas and went to Mexico. I brought my Matthew's ashes with me and left a bit of him there in a special place. It's about recognizing what you need to get through it and for me that meant separating myself from the chaos and emotion of the day. If you decide to try it, give yourself an easy out to go when you've had enough. My journey has been about knowing what I need, when I need it and that he's always here with me." — Sara B.
9. "If you have any family traditions you feel up to doing, do them. If you don't feel like doing them, don't. There is no right or

wrong way to feel right now... Just listen to yourself and how you feel — but if you are needing help, please please reach out.” — Erika A.

10. “It gets better! Keep their love and memories alive, celebrate their gifts and the love you were fortunate enough to have been given by them! It is painful now, but just know that it gets better.” — Jen W.

11. “Don’t be afraid to feel. Feel sadness, feel anger, feel joy, loss, love. Never feel like you have to justify your emotions. Try not to dwell on the fact it’s holiday season (my dad killed himself three days before Thanksgiving). That first holiday for us was hard, as we were lost, and were still coming to grips with what was happening. Be thankful for those around you, especially the ones who reach out. This is hard for them, too. The ones who really care may want to help but don’t know how. And you may not know how to accept their help. That’s OK. There’s no handbook for this kind of thing.” — Nikki J.

12. “After my brother died, my mom stopped all of her traditional holiday stuff. I get it — these were things my family did as a whole, and now we are missing a piece of our family. Just know that one person’s way of coping may not be yours. Cry. It’s OK. Smile. It’s OK. Laugh. It’s OK. Just remember to breathe.” — Andrea F.

13. “Set boundaries. For me, I told people don’t hug me. A hug was a sure way for me to lose it. It’s OK if you find yourself smiling or even laughing. It doesn’t mean you don’t miss your loved one. Talk about your loved one so other people will know it’s OK. Just go easy on yourself and let others know what you need and what you don’t.” — Pamela R.

14. “Do one small or big meaningful thing to honor them. Think of something that was unique to them and figure out a way to honor that. Sometimes it is something big — like going to an amusement park and screaming your head off on a roller coaster because that’s what they loved. Sometimes it’s reading a book they loved. It could be making a Christmas ornament or purchasing one that reminds you of them. Go big, go small, but go do it. It is hard at first, but eventually it becomes something to look forward to and is a way of keeping them a part of the celebration. We tried skipping Christmas, and it was not a good fit for us. Just know that what works for some, may not work for you and *that is OK!* Everyone has different needs, and it is a process of trial and error, but don’t be afraid to try different things. I wish you all love, support, peace, and yes, joy in remembrance of the incredible person your loved one was and continues to be in your life.” — Kristine S.

15. “Don’t try to do everything. Decide what is most important to you. Take one day, or even one hour at a time. Just breathe. Cry if you need to. I am in this ‘survivor’ thing now for my 14th Christmas. It is easier to laugh now than cry when I think of my daughter. She is missed dearly. Know that time will make things better, but they will never be like they were... Remember the all-important three ‘Fs’.....Faith, Family and Friends. They will help you through anything!” — Sharon F.

16. “I would say the most important thing is to take time out and care for yourself; eat well, get some exercise, stay hydrated, minimize alcohol use. Don’t feel obligated to attend every party and event, just do what you can. Find a local support group in your area, and attend regularly. If your spiritual and attend church, keep going and ask for any resources there that can help you. Lean

on ‘safe’ people during this time, and accept help from others. Try and find a good grief counselor. Don’t be afraid to cry, cry as much as you need to. Most important — make time alone, but don’t isolate yourself.” — Jessica C.

17. “As a survivor of an attempt and a survivor or many many losses, I find it helps to surround yourself with people you love. It absolutely gets better even though it seems like it never will. Take it one day at a time and if you need a breakdown, then have one. Also, there’s nothing wrong with the way you feel so don’t let anyone tell you different! We all process loss differently. Just keep your head up. It gets better.” — Nikki S.

18. “The first year we used Christmas Day to plan a trip and ignored everyone and everything else. The second year we created new traditions. Traditions that honored our love for our daughter and simultaneously let us try and create a life where we could celebrate a holiday in her absence.” — Janiece M.

19. “A friend suggested getting a candle. Place the candle where it can be seen from almost anywhere in the living/family room. Find something with a scent you love. Light it first thing in the morning and let it burn all day. The scent will permeate the house and you will catch the glimmer throughout the day, even if its only from the corner if your

eye. My son died six weeks before Christmas in 2001. That candle was the symbol of his presence for both myself and my family. There he was in his scent and in his light.” — Barbara A.

20. “I found that sometimes the anticipation of the holidays are worse than the actual day. I was so concerned about what to expect, what to do to remember my dad, that when Christmas and other holidays came, it was just another day. I got to choose how to spend it. I could decide to start new traditions, or stop old ones. I was gentle with myself and allowed myself to grieve in whatever way felt right at that moment. It was a simple and quiet first Christmas without him (the ‘year of firsts’ often is), but it gave me time to figure out how I could manage the holidays and discover what really matters. Does the holiday card really matter? No. But calling loved ones became more important. My family and I completely changed the way we give presents, and I also started my own tradition of writing to him and pondering how he might react or enjoy how I am spending my holidays now. It is also imperative to remind myself that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and that everyone grieves in their own way — and that’s OK. We initially have to take it minute by minute, not day by day. The loss shapes us and grows us — we never move on, we just make room.” — Chandel B.

By Sarah Schuster, The Mighty

“Mourning never really ends. Only as time goes on, it erupts less frequently.”

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Luminaries for a Loved Life

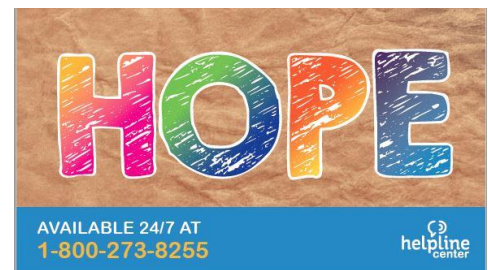


Survivors joined together at Augustana University for the Helpline Center’s “Luminaries for a Loved Life Event” for the International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day on November 18th, 2017. The day brought family and friends together in support and healing. Survivors created lanterns in remembrance of their loved ones that were used to illuminate a path forward. The event centered around the message of healing as survivors shared their thoughts and stories on the healing board. Our speaker and survivor, Tod Lacey, gave a talk that left survivors feeling connected through his message of hope, reminding those in grief that through sorrow comes healing.

Surviving After Suicide (SAS) Support Group & 10-Week Class

We will start our next **Surviving After Suicide (SAS) Class** on January 2, 2018. The SAS Class is led by a professional counselor and is held on Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30pm for 10 consecutive weeks at the Helpline Center. Registration is required and we ask that you commit to attending all of the 10 sessions. The supportive mourning process is guided by participant needs and a handbook organized chronologically to follow the days, weeks, and months after a suicide loss. It includes straightforward information about grief and practical strategies for coping and healing.

To register, visit our website at helplinecenter.org and click on Survivor Services and Surviving After Suicide Classes or call directly at 605-274-1416 or 211 and ask for Sheri.



The **SAS Monthly Support Groups** is held the first Thursday of each month from 7:00-8:30pm at the Helpline Center- 1000 N. West Ave, Suite 310. The next meetings are scheduled for **December 7th and January 4th**. Our SAS meetings are held in an atmosphere that is warm and friendly and nonjudgmental and led by a professional counselor. Anyone who has lost a family member or friend is invited to attend, whether it is a recent loss or many years ago. Feelings shared are kept confidential and discussed only within the confines of the group meeting. Thus, our SAS support groups provide a comfortable, non-threatening setting to share our experiences and thoughts. Questions are encouraged to help in coping with the different stages of the grieving process and with the feelings that are particularly intense in the aftermath of suicide-denial, shock, disbelief, sadness, anger, guilt and shame. We end our discussion sessions by sharing something positive that has recently taken place or something good you are anticipating. There is no fee and no registration required.



The Helpline Center is featured in the December issue of the 605 Magazine. The suicide support and prevention programs are highlighted. You can find the article on their website <http://605magazine.com/issues/>.

