

## The first Christmas without a loved one

If you're loved one died over the past year you may be dreading this first Christmas without them, having to work through the build-up to the festive period and facing memories of the past. It can be incredibly difficult and sad. Here are some coping strategies that other have found helpful in navigating Christmas without their loved one.

### Do things differently this year

For some people holding with traditions, following the patterns of past years can be hugely comforting and helpful. For others the thought of doing what they have always done is too painful. Think outside the box, are there things you could do differently?

### Allow yourself to grieve

Often the anticipation of certain dates and times of year can be worse than the actual days themselves. Simply recognising that the upcoming days or weeks might be difficult, can help to reduce anxiety around how you are going to cope.

### It's OK if you don't want to go out

You might not feel up to socialising and that's okay. Sometimes just having a nice bunch of flowers or a photo to look at, in the comfort of your home, and a still moment of reflection can help you through the day.

### Gardens can be a healing space

Gardens can be a wonderful, quiet space to reflect on your loss. Some people find it comforting to plant flowers or a tree in memory of their loved one, that year by year watching it grow keeps the connection

### Let others know how you wish to spend your time

Do you want to continue traditions, begin new ones or not celebrate it at all? Choose what you want to do and don't feel guilty if what you decide may not feel like it's the 'right' thing to do.

### Be kind to yourself

Grief can be exhausting. Look after yourself practically, physically and emotionally. If sleeping has become difficult, have a guilt-free afternoon nap. Don't worry if this happens – you aren't at your sparkling best so be gentle with yourself.

### Reach out for support if you think you need it

Some people might feel awkward about offering their help, especially if they don't know how to broach the subject. So if you want some company or support on Christmas, make the effort to ask for it.

Don't forget Samaritans (116 123) <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/samaritans-in-scotland/> and Breathing Space (0800 838587) <https://breathingspace.scot/> are there to listen.

### Involve children in decisions on how they want to spend their time

Ask them how they feel about Christmas, and let them know that they can share any thoughts and feelings with you about the person who has died. They may be worried about upsetting you. It's important for children to feel included, and they may have some great ideas on what to do.

It may be helpful to speak to the school to know how they plan to celebrate Christmas so you know how best to support your child.

### **Have some quiet time to reflect on the good times you shared**

What did you enjoy doing together before your loved one died? You may find some comfort doing the same things you used to do together at this time of the year, such as sharing a favourite drink or visiting a special place.

### **Don't feel guilty if you have moments of enjoyment**

Allow yourself to enjoy brief moments of respite if they happen and don't feel bad when they do.

### **Talk about your favourite memories**

Take the chance to talk about your loved one. You could light a candle by a photograph or release a balloon in memory.