

Surviving The Big Days
The Holidays, Anniversaries, and Birthdays
By Kevin J. Keelen

It's pretty much universal knowledge that the holiday season can magnify our feelings of loss and sorrow. These future dates can be so all-consuming that they can emotionally destroy each day leading up to them. And so, I would like to offer a few gentle suggestions for us to get through the holidays. My hope is to offer some practical suggestions to relieve some of the building anxiety and help us to navigate through.

During the approach of a date, our brains, as if we aren't in enough pain, seem to reach out to future dates looking for more. We feel pain that hasn't even arrived yet. When the day comes, nine out of ten people share that it wasn't as bad as they were convinced it would be. Please try to keep this in mind. It is very important to be aware of our inner narrative as the holidays and other special dates approach.

SELF CARE- Please be sure to put yourself on your own list -at the top of your list. We really do need to take good care of ourselves. With that in mind, try to allow yourself to have a '**pass**' for the holidays for anything you feel is too much - a pass to do or NOT to do whatever you want according to your comfort level. People need to respect your decisions, and if they do not, it's on them. *(It doesn't have to be forever, just this holiday season... allow yourself the flexibility to do things differently this year knowing it can always change next year.)*

Have a Plan- Whatever you decide to do for a holiday, it is a good idea to have some kind of a plan ahead of time (even if your plan is to do nothing, it is still a plan). It may even be a good idea to have a plan A and a plan B, just in case you change your mind. You are allowed to do that too.

Have an Escape Clause- I always plan an escape if I go somewhere. Either I drive or have a ride home, or I can call an Uber or a cab. An escape plan may come in handy if you become uncomfortable or tired and decide to leave earlier than you anticipated. It also just helps to know you are not trapped. LOL

Lean In- I want to encourage that you can and will get through this. One of the best ways through is, rather than avoiding the feelings that are inevitable in grief, is to lean into them. Allow yourself to feel whatever it is you need to feel at that

particular time. Like a wave, it will wash over us, and sometimes knock us on our butts, but we will get back up again, knowing that there are more to come. Sometimes it is better to just let the wave catch up and wash over us. Perhaps try taking a bit of time each day, whether you prefer morning or evening, to simply sit, either outside or inside, and just lean into the grief. **Let it come with all the feelings that are necessary.** Try not to let the fear of feeling keep you from doing it. These feelings will not drown us (although at times it may feel like it). We need to feel them in order to heal and move forward. This may be particularly important on those holidays that we know will be difficult. If we spend a little time allowing the feelings to catch up and flow, it may be like releasing the pressure of it all so that we can get through the rest of the day.

Avoid Self-Medicating- I understand how there may be a desire to do some, *or a lot*, of self-medicating during these emotional and difficult times. Try to stay aware of your intake of alcohol, food, medication, and recreational drugs. There is no potion, no pill, and no other way through grief than to grieve. Self-medicating usually makes things worse.

Move your body - Be sure to move around in some way. This could be a walk around the block or some stretching or yoga, a bike ride etc. Getting outside has extra healing benefits. We need the vitamin D. We need to breathe some fresh air, to hear the birds, see the blue sky, and to move our bodies. We need the endorphins secreted by the brain during movement and exercise to feel better. This moving around and distraction of the brain can offer some much-needed relief and release.

Mindfulness- Being attentive to your senses and allowing yourself to be aware of your surroundings and attentive to the present moment rather than the past or the future. This is going to be helpful throughout the journey of grief. So if you have not looked into mindfulness meditation, perhaps this may be a good time to give it a try.

Eat!- I know a lot of us may have no, or very little appetite, but try to plan on preparing or ordering a nice meal that you will enjoy. For those who are staying home, perhaps you may like to cook for yourself or give it a try if it's been awhile?

Ask for help. The people who know us and love us are more than willing to help if we only ask. They may have no idea how overwhelmed or emotional you are feeling, and it is perfectly ok to give them cues as to what they can do or not do to help you.