



# Managing Difficult Times

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*A Handout for people with  
complicated grief*

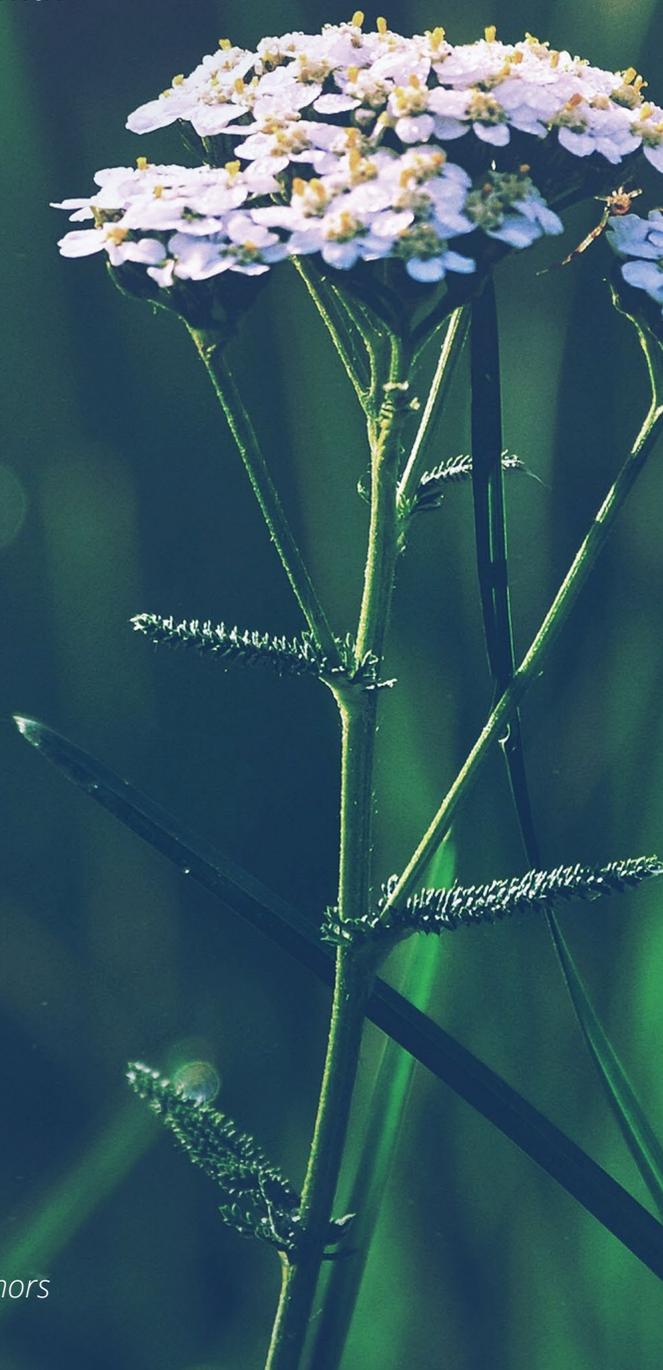
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## WHAT IS A DIFFICULT TIME?

Certain times of the year are especially painful for a bereaved person. This handout is designed to help manage these difficult times. Examples include the family holidays, especially the period between thanksgiving and new years day, the day of the death, the deceased person's birthday, the bereaved person's birthday, a wedding anniversary after the loss of a spouse, the first day of school each year, mother's or father's day after the loss of a child, parent's anniversary or mother's or father's day after the loss of a parent. Or, if your deceased loved one especially enjoyed the fall, you might find that time of year especially difficult. The anniversary of becoming pregnant might be difficult for someone who has lost a child. The winter solstice might be hard for a person who lost a close friend with whom she had celebrated this date every year.

## PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING DIFFICULT TIMES

There is no right and wrong kind of grief, and there is no prescription for managing difficult times. Our principles are simply suggestions about ways you might take a little control of your own life. It is up to you to decide whether and how to do so.

### PRINCIPLE 1: ANTICIPATE AND PLAN FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

You can probably predict when these times will occur and you might want to make plans for how you want to spend the time. This will help you feel a little more in control even though these times are difficult regardless of whether you acknowledge this ahead of time or not. Think about which times are difficult for you. Make some notes about this. Try to anticipate and accept how you will feel and practice self-compassion.

### PRINCIPLE 2: HONOR CONTINUING BONDS TO THE PERSON WHO DIED

We have permanent bonds to people to whom we are very close and their death does not bring an end to their influence upon us. It does change the nature of that influence. It is different to love a person who died, but our bond with them continues. You can honor that bond, even as



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you miss your loved one terribly. Consider that a deceased loved one has needs that are different from when they were alive. They may need you to honor them, to take time to remember their achievements, their accomplishments, their love and caring, or other admired traits or actions. They may need you to let them be gone, to acknowledge their new status and not try to bring them back. They may need you to visit them at their final resting place, or to tend to that place.

## **PRINCIPLE 3: FIND PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES FOR YOURSELF AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE STILL ALIVE.**

Periods of celebration or of marking a life transition are the very times many people find difficult, and they are also opportunities to find moments of joy for yourself and also to share with loved ones who are still living. Positive emotions help us think more clearly and solve problems more effectively and have beneficial physical effects as well. So, in addition to missing your loved one, try to find ways to allow yourself and your remaining loved ones to experience positive feelings. Enjoy the Hannukah lights, the Christmas tree or the Kwanza celebration. Share the warmth and love of people around you. Plan to go to a special performance or take a walk in the snow. Try to think about things that you can truly enjoy, even if only for a few minutes, in the midst of your sorrow.

## **PRINCIPLE 4: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND LET OTHERS TAKE CARE OF YOU.**

Even if you are well prepared, difficult times are just that. They are likely to trigger painful emotions and you need to soothe yourself as best you can. Be sure that you put yourself on the list of people you are planning to take care of. Lower your expectations of yourself and give yourself time and permission to feel sad. Maybe you don't need to be a cheery host or take on too many obligations. You can accept help from friends and family. Let others take over activities that you find stressful or unpleasant. Maybe someone else can plan the party, take care of the kids, prepare meals, do the laundry. Maybe someone else can help you decide what will help you relax or have fun. Consider asking someone to do one of these things. Try to bring others into your life in a helpful way, even if you are not feeling as connected to them as you have in the past.

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## WORKSHEET 1: IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT TIMES

Below are some examples of times bereaved people find difficult. Think about how you feel on these days, and add others if you wish. Using the scale below, rate how difficult you expect each day to be and make notes about why.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4  
 Not at all            A Little            Somewhat            Definitely            Extremely

Event	Date	Rating	Notes
1. Anniversary of the death			
2. Birthday of the person who died			
3. Your Birthday			
4. Other Birthdays (note whose it is)			
a.			
b.			
c.			
5. Wedding anniversary of the person who died			
6. Holidays (Specify which ones)			
a.			
b.			
c.			
Other difficult times			
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			

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## Worksheet 2: Planning activities

Identify the difficult time and make a list of how you can plan to do things in each area

### Difficult Time

Care for the person who died

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Plan fun or satisfying things to do

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Take care of yourself

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## Worksheet 3: Monitoring activities

List your planned activities and rate the intensity of grief, the level of negative and positive emotions, on a scale from 0-10, where 0= none at all and 10 is the highest you can imagine.

Then, list some of your thoughts or reactions, after you do these activities.

Activity	Grief intensity	Negative emotions	Positive emotions	Thoughts