

# Surviving The Season

Coping With Grief During  
The Holidays and Other Special Days



**Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT**

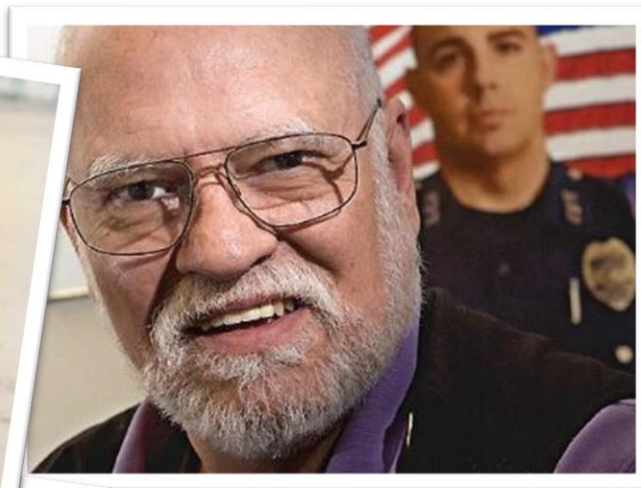
*Author, Mindfulness & Grief  
and From Grief To Peace*

# Why are the holidays so hard?

- ♥ Heightened emotions during holidays
- ♥ The contrast of past joy and current loss
- ♥ Societal pressures and expectations
- ♥ Constant reminders are everywhere
- ♥ Disruption of routines and traditions
- ♥ Shift in social and familial connections









- ♥ Physical
- ♥ Emotional
- ♥ Psychological
- ♥ Spiritual
- ♥ Behavior
- ♥ Relationships
- ♥ Finances





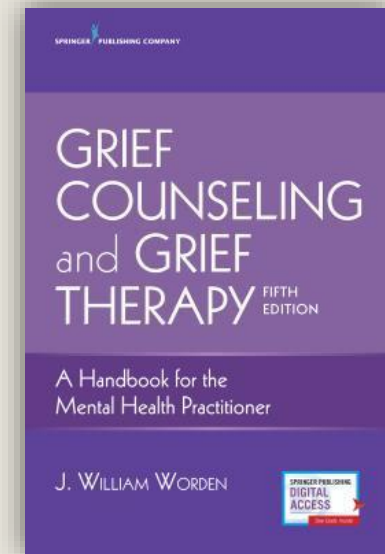
**Your grief is as unique as  
the relationship between  
you and your loved one.**

**So what you need may  
be different from even  
those closest to you.**



# Why Do We Grieve Differently?

- ♥ Mediator 1: Kinship
- ♥ Mediator 2: The Nature of the Attachment
- ♥ Mediator 3: How The Person Died
- ♥ Mediator 4: Historical Antecedents
- ♥ Mediator 5: Personality Variables
- ♥ Mediator 6: Social Variables
- ♥ Mediator 7: Concurrent Losses & Stresses

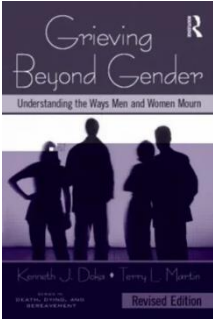


Worden (2018)



# Intuitive

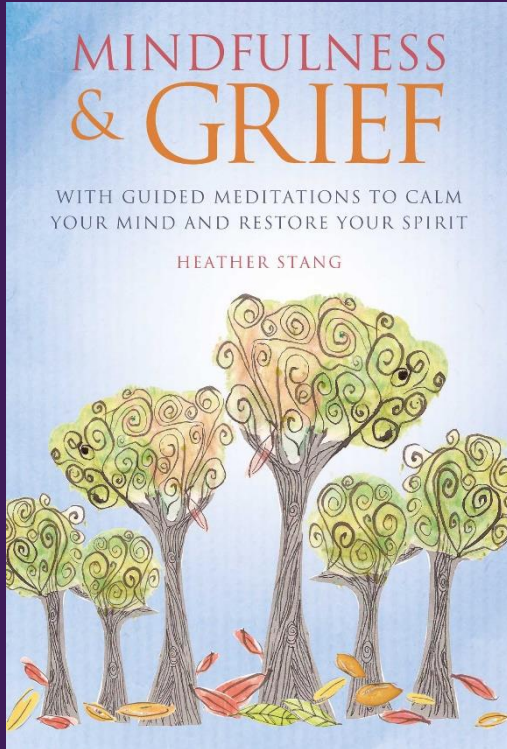
# Instrumental



Doka & Martin (2010)







“Rather than turn our back on our own suffering, we treat ourselves as we would a beloved friend. We take the time to pay attention to the physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings that accompany our pain.”

*From Mindfulness & Grief (p. 15)*





# How are you feeling about the winter holidays?



## The Grief-Sensitive Winter Holiday Planner



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Year \_\_\_\_\_

How are you feeling about the winter holidays?

Great  Good  Okay  Not good  Awful

Say more about what you are feeling here.

**Coping Skills:** In the checklist below, list the coping mechanisms that offer you instant emotional relief when you're feeling overwhelmed. These are your go-to strategies for regaining balance in stressful moments.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Physical movement (walk, yoga, dance)	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Contacting a support person	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____

**Self-care Practices:** Outline the self-care rituals that serve as your personal reset and fortify your resilience. Note how often—daily, weekly, or monthly—you intend to engage in each activity.

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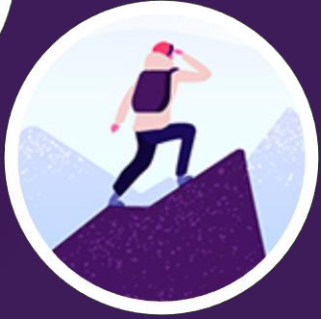
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Learn more at [mindfulnessandgrief.com/holiday-planner](https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/holiday-planner)  
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Grief changes the holiday landscape, but it doesn't have to dictate it. With compassionate planning, we can find a way to honor both our loss and ourselves during this season and beyond.





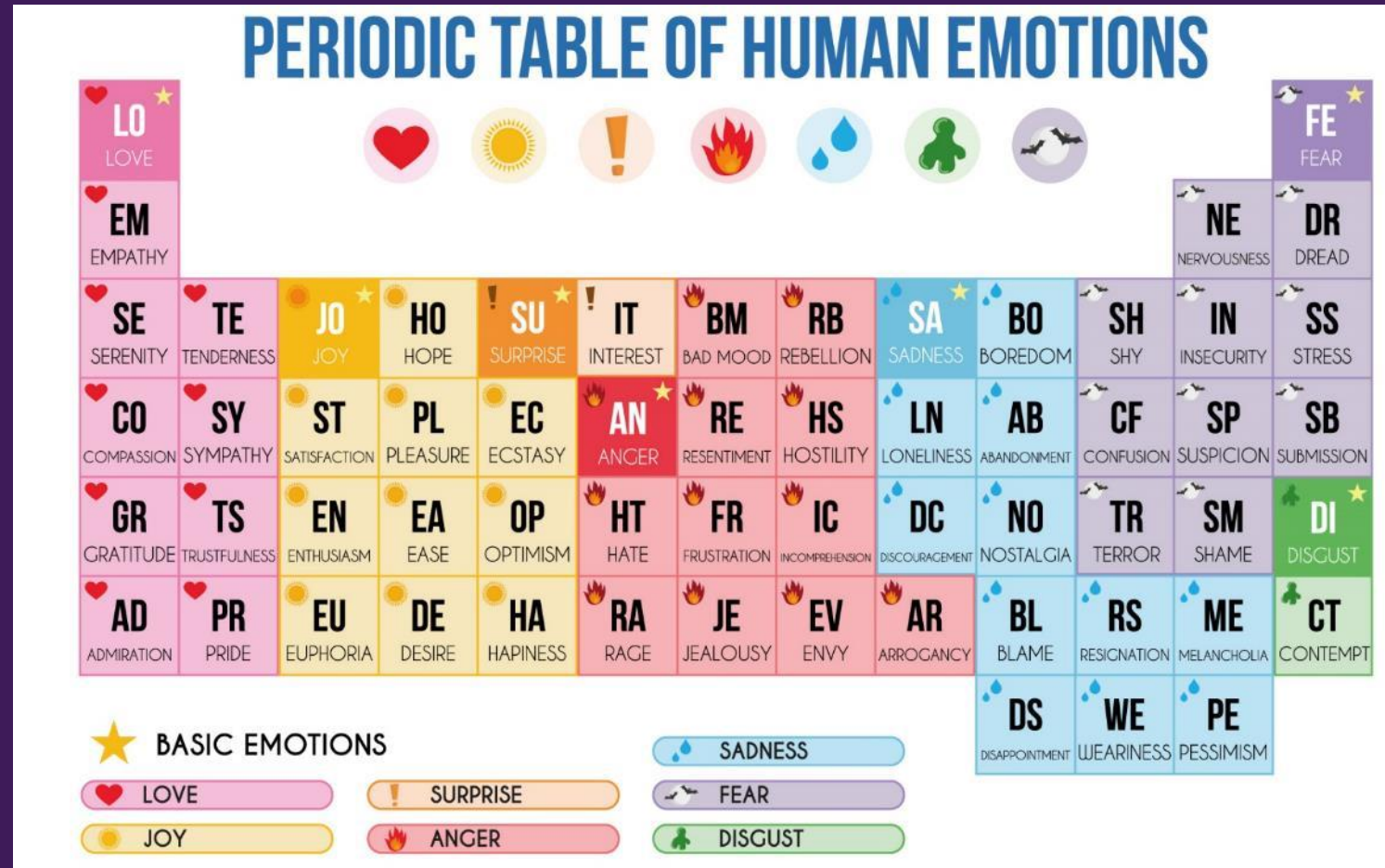


**Coping skills reduce  
psychological distress.**



# 3 Elements Of An Emotion

1. Subjective Experience
2. Physiological Response
3. Behavioral Response





# Respond to unexpected waves

- ♥ Accept that you may will get tipped over
- ♥ Designate a physical safe space
- ♥ Know what you can control and what you can't
- ♥ Know your triggers so you can anticipate them
- ♥ Keep track of what helps and do more of that
- ♥ Know who you need (people, pets)
- ♥ Know what you need (music, blankets, chocolate)





## A Grief Coping Box Can Help You:

- ♥ Identify and express thoughts.
- ♥ Comfort you.
- ♥ Provide positive distraction.
- ♥ Fuel your sense of hope, motivation and perseverance.
- ♥ Shift your mindset from worrying and overanalyzing to a problem-solving mentality.

<https://thehealthsessions.com/coping-box/>





# Quick Fix: Tune In To Your Senses

- ♥ **Sight:** Picture of beach
- ♥ **Sound:** Grief playlist
- ♥ **Taste:** Peppermint tea
- ♥ **Touch:** Soft blanket
- ♥ **Smell:** Essential oils



## Support System Superlatives

Take a tip from your high school year book and assign support superlatives to your friends and family. Determine what you need help with and then decide who's 'most likely' to provide the best assistance. Don't worry about hurt feelings, these are for your eyes only. Here are a few examples...

1. Most likely to help me pack my loved one's things
2. Most likely to watch my children.
3. Most likely to take a day or weekend trip with me
4. Best listener.
5. Best advice giver.
6. Most likely to not pass judgement.
7. Most understanding.
8. Most likely to help me organize my finances.
9. Most likely to let me sleep on their couch.
10. Most likely to quickly respond in an emergency.
11. Most rational.
12. Most likely to make me laugh.
13. Most likely to help me with home repairs.
14. Most likely to carpool to and from my child's school and other activities.
15. Most likely to talk with me about my loved one.
16. Most likely to volunteer with me or help me fight a cause in my loved ones honor.
17. Most likely to celebrate my loved ones birthday with me.
18. Most likely to tell me truth.
19. Most likely to notice I'm having a hard time.
20. Most likely to answer the phone at 1 am.
21. Most likely to spend the holidays with me or invite me to spend the holiday with them.
22. Most likely to motivate me.
23. Most likely to exercise with me.
24. Most likely to give me good advice on my opposite sex children.
25. Most likely to still be supportive a year from now

“Let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

1. Be more open to asking for help
2. Identify your needs
3. Identify the best person to help

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/support-system-superlatives-a-journaling-exercise/>





# R.A.I.N.: Working With Difficult Emotions

- **RECOGNIZE** - Acknowledge what you are feeling. What is happening inside me right now?
- **ALLOWING (Acceptance)** - Be willing to be present to your experience, no matter how unpleasant. Whatever you notice, let it be. (Tara Brach recommends noting “I consent” or “yes” or “this too”).
- **INVESTIGATE** - Unhook yourself from the object or story, so you can witness the embodied emotion with kindness, and from an unbiased perspective.
- **NURTURE** – Offer yourself mercy and care as you would an ideal best friend. Words of kindness, a gentle caress, or an acknowledgement of how hard this is are a few ways to practice.

(Brach, 2020)



# Self-Compassion Mantra

Imagine the most compassionate and understanding person your can - real or imagined. As you reflect on these questions, conjure of a feeling of being comforted and seen by this being.

- ♥ What would they say to you or do to show they understand your pain?
- ♥ How would they remind you that you are not flawed for having these feelings, you are just a human being doing the best you can given the circumstances you are in - many of which are out of your control?

Finally, write down a sentence or two that you will say to yourself next time you feel self-critical in the box above, and place it somewhere that you will see it regularly. Memorize your self-compassion mantra and say it to yourself whenever you catch yourself in a cycle of self-criticism.





# List the coping mechanisms that offer you instant emotional relief.



**The Grief-Sensitive Winter Holiday Planner**

MINDFULNESS & GRIEF INSTITUTE

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\_\_\_\_\_ Daily Weekly Monthly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Daily Weekly Monthly  
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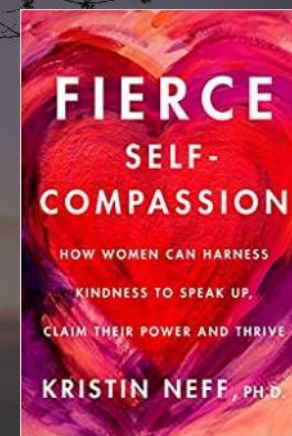
**Self-care activities  
increase your resilience.**





# Healthy Motivation & The Three Components of Self-Compassion

1. Kindness manifests as encouragement
2. Common humanity provides wisdom
3. Mindfulness gives vision and clarity



# Befriend your body



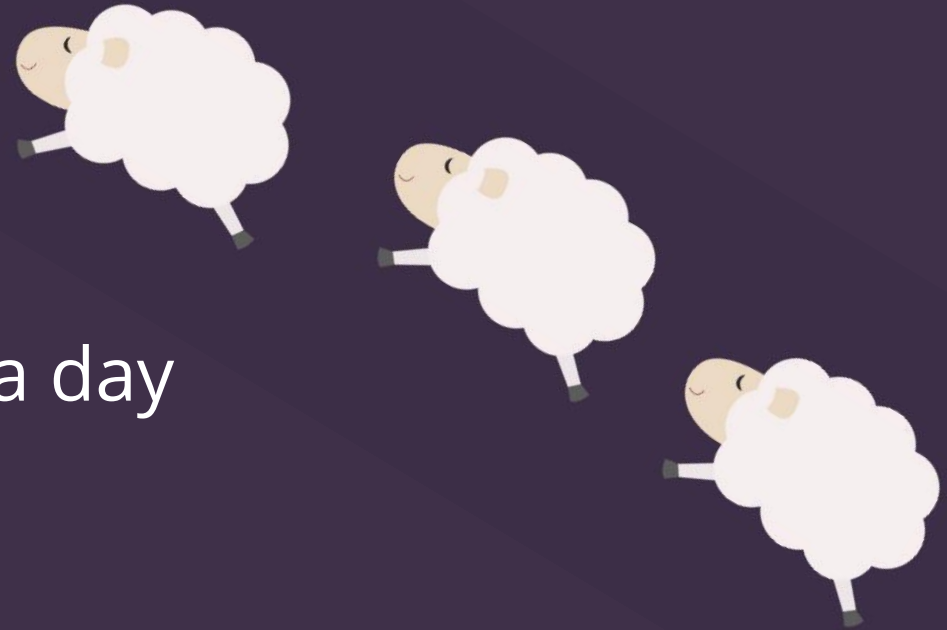
- ♥ Schedule a check-up with your healthcare provider
- ♥ Pay attention to physical sensations
- ♥ Receive bodywork: massage, reiki, yoga therapy, etc.





# Good Sleep Hygiene

- ♥ Stick to a sleep schedule
- ♥ Move your body for 30 minutes a day
- ♥ Limit caffeine and alcohol
- ♥ Create a sleep sanctuary
- ♥ Manage lighting & devices
- ♥ Have a bedtime relaxation ritual



# Build Resilience Into Your Life


- ♥ The givens: sleep, nutrition, hydration, movement
- ♥ Schedule time to enjoy the people and animals around you
- ♥ Schedule alone time doing something pleasurable and/or creative
- ♥ Plan regular daily, weekly, & monthly self-care activities that you enjoy
- ♥ Know your “go-to” coping skills and practice as often as needed





# List and plan the self-care rituals that serve as your personal reset and fortify your resilience.



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# Lean Into Your Support Systems



- ♥ Close friends who listen without judgment
- ♥ Family members who offer comfort
- ♥ Support groups that share your experience
- ♥ Religious or spiritual organizations that provide solace
- ♥ Therapists and other grief professionals





# Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

1. Practice self-kindness
2. Reflect on Common Humanity
3. Communicate with compassion
4. Have a Plan B
5. Take a Pass
6. “Wrap yourself in white light and bless them”
7. Practice *metta* meditation




<https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/deal-with-difficult-people-grief-holiday/>



# List the people and groups that can offer you support, then schedule meet ups.




 MINDFULNESS & GRIEF INSTITUTE

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# Holiday Events: Yes or No?

- ♥ Evaluate your emotional capacity
- ♥ Consider the significance of the event
- ♥ Trust your instincts
- ♥ Offer thanks for the invitation
  - ♥ Express gratitude
  - ♥ Prioritize your wellbeing
  - ♥ Be honest but brief
  - ♥ Offer to connect later



# List holiday events and choose what and how to reply.



## The Grief-Sensitive Winter Holiday Planner



**Holiday Events:** What events or gatherings are you invited to this year? Write those down, choose whether to attend them or not, then brainstorm what you want to say to the planner when you decline the invitation.

EVENT	ATTENDING	SCRIPT/KEY PHRASES
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

**Holiday Traditions:** List the traditions that have been a part of your holiday celebrations, and choose whether you'd like to keep them as they are, modify them to better suit your current emotional state, or release them for now, knowing you can always bring them back in a future season.

EXISTING TRADITIONS	ACTION
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep <input type="checkbox"/> Modify <input type="checkbox"/> Release
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep <input type="checkbox"/> Modify <input type="checkbox"/> Release
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep <input type="checkbox"/> Modify <input type="checkbox"/> Release
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**Create a New Tradition:** Reflect on your most cherished holiday memory with the person you want to remember. Then, circle and add any emotions from the word cloud that you'd like your new tradition to evoke. With those emotions as your guide, brainstorm a new, heartfelt tradition that honors either your loved one or yourself, providing you with emotional connection throughout the holiday season.

HOLIDAY MEMORY	NEW TRADITION EMOTIONS
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 100px; width: 100%;"></div>	love joy warmth gratitude comfort connection
	happiness peace nostalgia laughter affection serenity
	inspiration trust hope harmony fondness contentment
	security admiration emancipation relief freedom
	compassion empathy unity bliss vitality ease
tenderness gentleness reverence delight enthusiasm	
courage resilience celebration playfulness kindness	
acceptance belonging fulfillment _____	_____

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# Revisiting Holiday Traditions

- ♥ Evaluate each tradition with care
- ♥ Align choices with your emotional needs
- ♥ Empowerment through intentional decisions
- ♥ Keep traditions that matter
- ♥ Release those that do not
- ♥ Modify existing traditions with meaningful ones



# List your holiday traditions and decide whether to keep, modify, or release each one.



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_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[Empty box for script/key phrases]
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
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# Create A New Tradition

- ♥ Reflect on cherished memories
- ♥ Select emotions to embody in new traditions
- ♥ Brainstorm ideas for new, meaningful practices
  - ♥ Memory jar
  - ♥ Candle lighting
  - ♥ A seat at the table
  - ♥ Charitable act
  - ♥ Nature walk
  - ♥ Storytelling
  - ♥ Annual letter
  - ♥ Recipe remembrance



# Reflect on a holiday memory, the feelings you want to create, and some ideas to celebrate the love that remains.



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	<b>NEW TRADITION IDEAS</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

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# May you know peace.

Awaken Grief Support Program  
[meditationforgrief.com](http://meditationforgrief.com)

Mindfulness & Grief Institute  
[mindfulnessandgrief.com](http://mindfulnessandgrief.com)

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