Your First Holiday After a Death

Choosing what to keep, change or pause

You may miss the way the holiday used to be and dread trying to recreate it. You might want a familiar tradition one moment and wish you could skip it the next.

You do not have to decide what the whole holiday should look like. Start with one part of it and consider what would matter to you this year.

You'll need: A pen and a little time to think. A calendar may help when you get to the practical details.

1. Choose one tradition. What are you thinking about keeping or changing? Notice what you value about it and what feels hard now.

2. Consider what you want this year. Would you like to keep it, make it smaller, do it differently, or pause it? It is okay if you are not ready to decide.

3. Ask for the support you would like. Perhaps someone could cook with you, offer a ride, or host instead. Tell them what would help and ask what they can offer.

4. Leave room for the day itself. You may feel different when it arrives. Think about how you could shorten a visit, change a plan, or ask for company afterward.

For example

Your mother always made soup for the holiday meal. You want to make it this year, but hosting the full dinner feels like too much. You ask your sister to cook with you and take some home afterward. It is not the same holiday, but it leaves room for something you still want. You can decide about next year when it comes.

A helpful reminder

Keeping a tradition and pausing it can both carry love. A different plan does not have to be a final decision. If grief is making everyday life hard to manage, a health professional or bereavement service can offer support alongside these practical plans.

Learn more: NHS: Grief after bereavement or loss

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Your planning page

Use this page to make a few notes. You do not need to fill every space.

1. What tradition is on my mind?

What do I value about it? What feels difficult this year?

2. Would I like to keep, change, pause or leave it undecided?

What might a manageable version look like?

3. What support would I like?

Who could I ask, and what have they said they can do?

4. If the day feels different, what could I change?

Consider the timing, the company and what might help afterward.

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