

Relate NI



**Dealing With Loss
During The Holidays**

About Relate NI

Relate NI is passionate about enabling good quality relationships and that's why our mission is to make expert information and support for healthy relationships available to everyone. Through our experience of working with parents and children throughout Northern Ireland, we've come to understand that relationships not only give our lives meaning, they are of vital importance to our happiness.

For the last 75 years, we have been supporting the health and wellbeing of children & young people, individuals, couples, and families through our therapeutic services because we know how important our relationships are to our health and wellbeing.

Visit our website for more guidance on how to 'Relieve the Pressure' on your relationships throughout Christmas and the Cost of Living Crisis.

relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure



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87% of people told us that relationship support helped to improve their well-being

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Relationship Transitions

Merry Christmas. Season's Greetings. Happy holidays. A time filled with lots of images of smiling people having fun together. Planning celebrations, decorating homes, organising get togethers with friends and family.

For many the focus on all this organised joy can be a painful reminder that they are grieving. The emphasis at Christmas on family and friends spending time together can cause pain. The plans being made are a poignant reminder that there will be a space that cannot be filled.

There has been so much loss over the past few years. The impact of the pandemic with so many people dying, the rising costs of living making the present feel very uncertain and the future daunting.

Grief from losing a loved one whether it is a parent, a child, a friend, an animal companion is an intensely personal experience. It is also a shared experience. To love is to open your heart and receive all the pleasure and adventures this brings. Loving another is the capacity to make yourself vulnerable and in the end that vulnerability will bring pain.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There's no right or wrong way to navigate Christmas without your loved one. It might be the first Christmas, or it might be the 31st Christmas without them, the feelings of sadness remain as they do each day of the year.

There is no timeframe on grief. For some people they can feel ready to step into their routine and a sense of normality after a few months while others can continue to experience intense emotional pain for years to come.

It's important that you find your way to navigate this Christmas experience. Death brings about huge change in the lives of those who remain. Being able to hold that loss means that we give ourselves permission to feel the range of emotions that keep bereavement company; the pain, the sadness, perhaps the anger of having been left behind.

While grief will remain part of your life it is helpful to find a way that it doesn't rule your life. Finding ways to support yourself with your loss can be part of taking care of your emotional wellbeing and mental health. This resource will explore some ideas on how you may be able to do this.

Relieving The Pressure

Remember them.

Think of ways that you can honour the memory of your loved one. Perhaps there are other family members who can share in thinking of ways to remember. Maybe this will be a special time to tell each other stories about each other's relationship with the person.

Part of the pain of grief is knowing that there will be no new adventures but there can be new memories told.

Sharing our memories helps us understand more about that person and the unique relationships they had. It provides a link to the person who has died. Our physical relationship may have ended but our emotional connection lasts until we die.

Telling your stories together with people who genuinely care for you can help you with the depth and range of emotions that you are feeling. When grief is shared you can support each other to know how you feel and to give each other comfort in not being alone in your pain.

On Christmas Day itself you may want to have some time to yourself to remember your loved one. You might want to have a conversation with them, or light a candle for them, take a favourite walk that you shared together - these are all gentle, quiet ways to honour their memory.

New traditions.

Consider creating new traditions. Perhaps you might like to have a beautiful Christmas card for your loved one and place it on the tree. Finding new ways to move forward while keeping the memory of our loved one close can support us.

Talk with your family about how you will feel coming up to Christmas and how the day itself might impact. By talking to one another you can accept the feelings that emerge.



Emotions.

For some people the temptation might be to power ahead with Christmas as though nothing has changed. Burying emotions in this way runs the danger of them emerging further down the line in ways that are difficult to manage, through a profound impact on your mental or physical health.

There may be times when a memory of your loved one at Christmas brings a smile, a warmth in the pleasure of remembering them. Those memories may also bring tears because they are no longer with you. Taking time to feel these emotions, to notice them, to name them will support you in your grieving process.

It also helps others who care for you to understand how you are feeling so they can better support you, too.

Being in touch with your emotions will also guide you if the burden of loss becomes a significant struggle.

[Reaching out to professional counselling organisations such as Relate NI might be helpful](#) or discussing it further with your GP.



Unhelpful Coping Mechanisms.

Feeling emotions that are uncomfortable can lead us to finding solace in toxic coping strategies.

Alcohol can be readily available at the festive period. There might be toasts at dinner time, a wee dram with the pudding and a little something afterwards. Alcohol might be everywhere as part of the celebrations.

It is important that alcohol doesn't become a crutch to lean on. For many people it is fine to have a few glasses to drink but there is a big difference between having a drink and becoming dependent on alcohol to function or manage your mood.

If you are noticing that alcohol is playing an increasing part in your day-to-day life you may want to [seek some support](#).

Equally, if you are finding that your grief and pain has become so overwhelming causing you to become very angry and upset with people you may wish to take some time out from the situation.

Take some time to soothe and regulate your feelings so that you can prepare yourself on what you can say or do next. There are some very helpful breathing and grounding exercises available in our ['Relieve the Pressure on Yourself' Resource](#).



Stigmatised grief.

All loss is not treated equally in our society, which can add to the heartache of those left behind. While it is not right or kind, there are different responses to different deaths. Compassion towards someone who has been bereaved by cancer can be very different to the reaction to a person or family grieving the death of a loved one from addiction or suicide.

Judgemental mindsets can be very hurtful and damaging to those mourning their loved one. The friends and family can feel very isolated in their grief and feel as though their pain is not recognised. If this is your experience don't let the lack of understanding diminish your grieving. Reach out to organisations that will be able to help.

In the end, grief doesn't care what time of the year it is. It doesn't care that there are supposed to be celebrations. The sheer power of the sense of loss can feel as though you are being engulfed by emotion. By starting to understand your emotions, naming them, and feeling them, you can start to feel more in control of your life rather than your grief taking control.

Communicating with those who care about you, letting them know how you are feeling can be very helpful and can guide those who love you in how best to care for you.

There is a legacy of love that can be honoured by remembering the joy that the person brought to your life. Part of this gift is giving yourself permission to enjoy yourself as part of the grieving. Your loved one would want you to continue living, to take pleasure in life.

We can Relate

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you to **Relieve the Pressure** you may be facing if you are experiencing loss this festive period.

Relate NI's team of skilled and professional counsellors are also available to help people with their relationship issues, whether big or small. Your relationship doesn't need to be at a time of crisis to benefit from Relate NI services. In fact, 78% of people who used our services last year told us they wished they'd attended sooner.

Use the details below to contact us to find out how we can support you.

If you would benefit from speaking to one of our trained counsellors, contact us at:

028 90323454
office@relateni.org

Relate NI Services:

- **Adult Relationship Counselling for Individuals Or Couples**
- **Family Counselling**
- **Relate Kids**
- **Relate Teen**
- **Sex Therapy**
- **Relationship MOT**

www.relateni.org/relieve-the-pressure

