

# EXPERT PANEL

Introducing the professionals behind *Happiful Magazine* helping to ensure we deliver the highest quality advice



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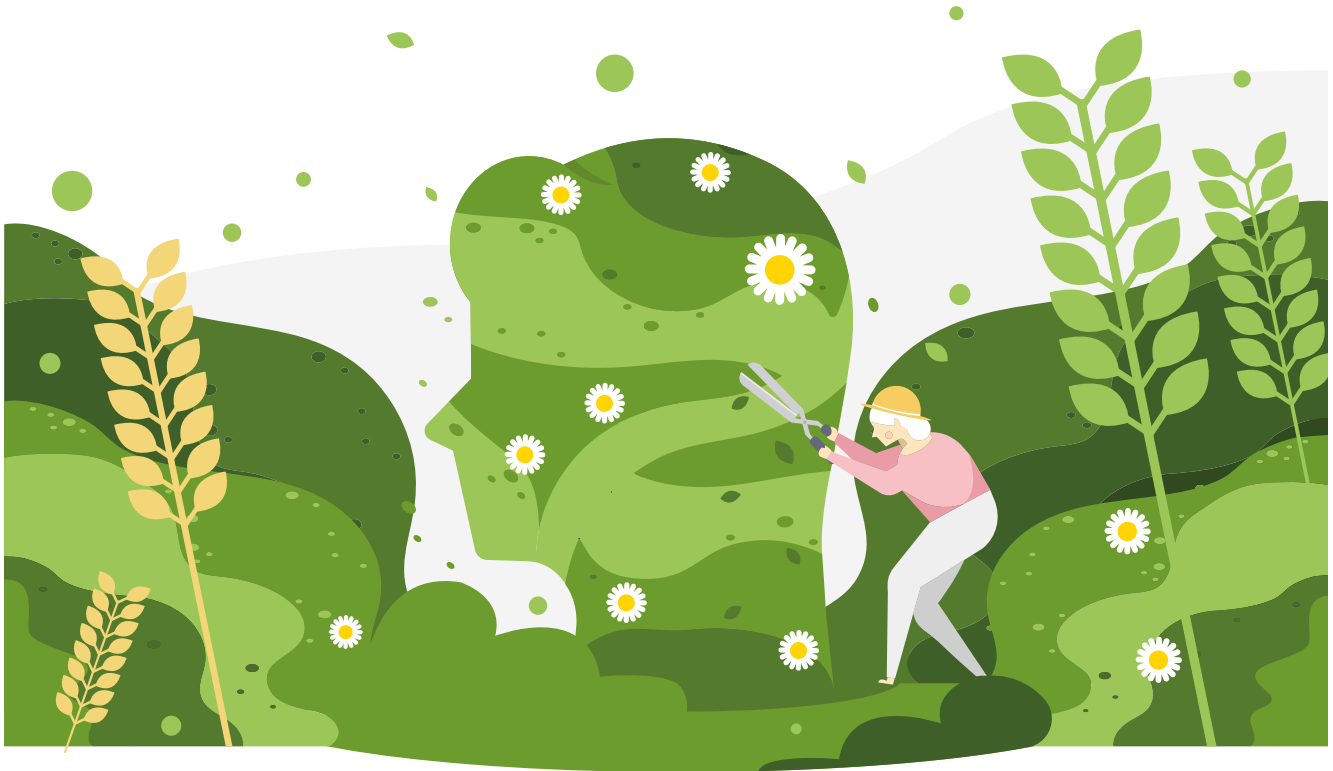
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# Coping with grief

Christmas is a time to spend with those we love the most. So, how can anyone be expected to cope during the holidays when a loved one has died? How can we celebrate togetherness, when it feels like we're apart?

Writing | **Nora Allali-Carling** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

**W**hen you are grieving, alongside the overwhelming sense of missing the one you love comes the crushing awareness of all that you've lost. You may feel stunned at the normalcy of life around you, as people go about their business, totally unaware that your world has stopped. For some, there is no worse time of the year to highlight this than Christmas.

The traditions and celebrations that add so much joy and meaning to the festivities can be punctuated with painful reminders of the person who is no longer here to share in it. You may be reluctant to turn to others, either because you haven't learned to accept or ask for help, or perhaps you're afraid others won't know what to do with your feelings.

For many people this is the hardest part of grieving, and a time when

we miss our loved ones even more than usual; Christmas can feel like something to endure rather than enjoy.

But while you may want to hide away, getting together with family and friends might give you a chance to laugh and remember fun times. It's important to know that having fun isn't a sign that you don't miss them, and it is OK to enjoy this time, if you can.

Here are some suggested steps to cope with grief and loss this Christmas:

## 1 Consider your traditions

It's important to acknowledge that this Christmas will be different to other years, and will be tough. You might want to think about your usual traditions, and decide if there are any you want to change if they bring painful reminders – you might want to re-arrange the furniture, for example, to reduce “absence” feelings.

## 2 Understand your emotions

This pain of loss can feel magnified at Christmas; the sadness feels sadder, and the loneliness goes deeper. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2018 5% of adults in the UK reported feeling “lonely” and “alone”, with women and those widowed being most at risk.

In order to lessen the loneliness after the death of a loved one, you have to find a way to accept what is, and try to find fulfilment in the reality you are now presented with.

Grief is ongoing and never ends. It isn't something you go through, but something that becomes a part of you, forever

## 3 Become self-accepting

When you feel ready, it's important to accept help, support, and company from those around you. Open yourself up to the love of the people in your life, and try to embrace new people in the process.

As well as accepting the current circumstances, it's important that we are self-accepting too. This is where we're able to embrace all facets of ourselves – not just the positive, “loveable” parts. To do this, we need to cultivate self-compassion, let go of any guilt, and learn to forgive ourselves.

## 4 Continue bonds

A 1996 study by Klass *et al.* suggested that it is normal for the bereaved to continue their bond with the deceased. They observed many cases in which remaining connected to the deceased provided comfort and support in coping with the loss and adjustment.

The process of continuing bonds acknowledges that grief is ongoing and never ends. It isn't something you go through, but something that becomes a part of you, forever. The theory also validates your grief, because it is normal to stay “connected” to your loved ones, and carry them throughout our lives.

Some ways you can look to continue your bonds through the holidays would be to share a funny story about your loved one. You might want to do an activity you always used to do together, or revisit a place you spent time with each other. It might even be nice to include one of your loved one's favourite dishes during celebrations.

## 5 Focus on your needs

Listen to yourself, and allow yourself to feel what you need to. Don't be afraid to express your sadness when you're feeling it, and know it's OK to excuse yourself to have a good long cry as often as you need to.

Remember that you can't always expect those around you to know what support you need, so it's important to communicate and tell them – whether that's being hugged, listened to, distracted, or time to remember and share stories about your person.

*If you're struggling with grief, speaking to a therapist could help you. Visit [counselling-directory.org.uk](http://counselling-directory.org.uk) to find a professional near you.*

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### How to support your bereaved friend

If a loved one is struggling with grief, here are a few starting points to support them:

- Let them know you are there if they want to talk
- Think about any small tasks or chores you can do to take something off their plate
- Allow them to talk about their loved one
- Use their loved one's name – it keeps the person alive in their hearts and minds