



Checklist for Planning a “Grief and the Holidays” Program

1. **Schedule a date, time, and location for the event:** The day of the week, the time of day, and the space you choose will vary given your practice setting and your desired audience. When Rainbow runs this program, we mostly present to a group size that is less than twenty people. A chapel, conference room, activity room, or a dining room is good setting for a grief and the holiday workshop. Typically, a “Grief and the Holidays” program will last 60 to 90 minutes.
2. **Finding someone to assist you:** It is not always possible to have someone co-facilitate a workshop with you. However, if it is possible, a co-facilitator can be a helpful resource to support attendees who may need to step out for a break during your workshop or to help orient late arrivals. Additionally, you may have creative arts in your facility. It’s always nice to have a music therapist participate in your workshop with you.
3. **Decide on a title:** If you have a creative idea of your own, then go with that. However, Rainbow has used several titles in the past that you may use if one of them resonates with you: *Grief and the Holidays*, *Hopeful Holidays*, or *Finding Hope and Joy in the Midst of Holiday Stress*.
4. **Advertise:** One of the challenges of running programming is getting the work out to the right audience. You know your marketing resources better than anyone. Use whatever resources are at your disposal. If you would like to market your workshops on Rainbow’s website, we would be happy to accommodate that request.
5. **Prepare your agenda:** In this packet, Rainbow is offering a general template for an agenda that you are welcome to use. You are welcome to adapt the agenda in any way that would meet the needs of your community. In general, you will notice the template follows a format that includes an opening ritual then education about grief and the holidays then a group discussion. We encourage you to adapt the format as well as you see fit.
6. **Gather all the items you’ll need:** Sometimes it’s the small things. Make a list of all the items you will need and collect them early. You may need candles for a ritual, tissue, or copies made of materials and handouts.
7. **Set up your space:** There are good reasons you may use any number of options for setting up your space. You may choose to present in a classroom style, or have smaller tables for intimate discussions, or you may choose a traditional support group open circle. There are good reasons to choose any of these options depending on the kind of experience you are looking to facilitate.



Agenda for Grief and the Holidays Program

1. Opening welcome and candle ritual (sample ritual is included)
2. Introductions: ask participants for their names, briefly who they lost, and their expectations/hopes for the workshop
3. Education and reflection on grief:
 - Manifestations of grief: body, emotions, mind, behavior, social, and spirit
 - Reflect on how adjusting to life changing loss includes both grieving the loss and adjusting to a new life after loss
 - Discuss coping with the “year of firsts” and how this includes the holidays
4. Collected Wisdom that has been gathered and intimately shared by those that have walked the path of loss before us. Reference handout that includes the following items:
 - Plan Ahead and Over-Plan: This is a way to prepare yourself with coping tools for what you anticipate might be hard. It’s generally better to over-plan and cancel later than to under-plan and be left scrambling at the last minute.
 - Ask for Help: It’s okay to do things differently this year. It’s okay to delegate responsibilities and ask for help. Sometimes people really want to help in any way they can, but they may just not know what to offer. By asking for help, you really are giving others a chance to support you; at the same time, you get some relief.
 - Break the Silence: If you or your family has experienced the death of someone important, you may find yourself in a common situation. Your friends and family may not want to upset you, when all you want is to talk about your loved one who isn’t there. Make it okay for yourself and others to talk about your loved one by using his or her name and sharing stories. Others will take their cue from you.
 - Share Memories: This is how we stay connected to people we love. This is also how we stay connected to people whom we have loved and lost. Share stories, pictures, and memories.
 - Embrace the Bittersweet: Even if you’re anticipating a difficult holiday season, try to seek pleasure in the people and things that are special and meaningful to you.
 - Use Rituals: Do what is familiar or create new rituals this year.



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5. Group Discussion Questions:

- Reflecting on previous holiday experiences, what will be different this year? What will be difficult? What are you looking forward to?
- What ritual or activities are you keeping this year, and what activities are you setting aside this year?
- Do you anticipate creating any new rituals or activities this year?

6. Close the workshop by asking participants to reflect on their “takeaways” including insights or ideas that they found meaningful in the workshop or discussion.



A Holiday Memorial Candle Ritual

Light has long been a symbol of comfort and hope. Ritual candle-lighting is a part of many of our lives at this time of year. For the followers of Islam, light is the source of inspiration, motivation and guidance from God. The Buddhists see light as a symbol of wisdom. In the Jewish tradition, Hanukkah lights are kindled as a reminder that God aided a people facing adversity. The Hindus create rows of lights to celebrate the time of harvest and to honor gods and goddesses. In many Christian traditions, Advent candles are lit in anticipation of Christmas and the fulfillment of a promise that light will again shine on those who sit in deep darkness.

Candle lighting can be a comforting symbol for those who mourn. For this memorial rite, five candles are used. They may be placed in a wreath or a candle stand – the form doesn't matter. What is most important are the memories evoked as your loved one is named and the candles are lit. We hope this memorial rite will help you honor your loved one, and perhaps, will become a lasting tradition as you mark the holidays in your home.

As we light these five candles in honor of those we love, we light one for our grief, one for our courage, one for our memories, one for our love, and one for our hope.

FIRST CANDLE: This candle represents our grief. The pain of loss is intense. It reminds us of the depth of our love.

AS WE LIGHT THIS CANDLE, WE REMEMBER.

SECOND CANDLE: This candle represents our courage – to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, and to change our lives.

AS WE LIGHT THIS CANDLE, WE REMEMBER.

THIRD CANDLE: This candle is in memory of those we love – the times we laughed, the times we cried, the times we were angry with each other, the silly things we did, and the caring and joy we shared.

AS WE LIGHT THIS CANDLE, WE REMEMBER.



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FOURTH CANDLE: This candle is the light of love. As we enter this holiday season, day by day we cherish the special place in our hearts that will always be reserved for those we love. We give thanks for the gift their living brought to each of us.

AS WE LIGHT THIS CANDLE, WE REMEMBER.

FIFTH CANDLE: And this candle is the light of hope. It reminds us of the love and cherished memories that are ours forever. May the glow of the flame be our source of hopefulness now and forever.

AS WE LIGHT THIS CANDLE, WE REMEMBER.

“Remember” from WHISTLING IN THE DARK by Frederick Buechner:

When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, you will know me. It means that even after I die, you will still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart. For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost.



Coping with Grief during the Holidays

There is a lot written about change, how it's the "law of life" (JFK) or the "only constant" (Heraclitus). Change is generally talked about as something we should approach with some level of acceptance or courage. While that could not be truer, what is sometimes left out of the conversation is that some changes are really difficult and require that we work extra hard to make it through a hard time.

The upcoming holidays—Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, and New Years—are times of joy and togetherness. However, they can also be filled with stress and challenges, especially if you've been through any number of difficult changes in the last year, such as: a change in level of independence; change in housing; change in your family; or the loss of friends, children, family members, or spouse.

There are very real things you can do to add joy and hope to this holiday season:

7. **Plan Ahead and Over-Plan:** This is a way to prepare yourself with coping tools for what you anticipate might be hard. It's generally better to over-plan and cancel later than to under-plan and be left scrambling at the last minute.
8. **Ask for Help:** It's okay to do things differently this year. It's okay to delegate responsibilities and ask for help. Sometimes people really want to help in any way they can, but they may just not know what to offer. By asking for help, you really are giving others a chance to support you; at the same time, you get some relief.
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10. **Share Memories:** This is how we stay connected to people we love. This is also how we stay connected to people whom we have loved and lost. Share stories, pictures, and memories.
11. **Embrace the Bittersweet:** Even if you're anticipating a difficult holiday season, try to seek pleasure in the people and things that are special and meaningful to you.
12. **Use Rituals:** Do what is familiar or create new rituals this year.