

Making it Through Valentine's Day After the Loss of a Spouse



While love and Cupid's arrow take center stage on Valentine's Day, for some the day can be a painful reminder of the deep connection they once had and the passing of their spouse or partner. Instead of sweet reminders of love, sentimental TV commercials promoting jewelry, dinner specials, and flowers can prompt a resurgence of the grief for a loved one who has passed. They're a reminder of a love stolen.

Whether the loss of a spouse or partner was two weeks ago or two decades ago, older adults don't have to simply accept the onslaught of Valentine's messages while they again work through sharp pangs of grief. There are several ways they can spend the holiday, including choosing to embrace the painful feelings, honoring their lost partners, avoiding the day, or celebrating the close relationships they have now. But perhaps the best is intentionally reframing the way you think about the day.

Change the Meaning of Valentine's Day

Remember, love is at the heart of Valentine's Day. It stands to reason that reframing the day can be a healthy way to cope with the holiday. While many view Valentine's Day through the lens of romantic love, it can be helpful to restructure how you see the day and take notice of all the love you have in your life, both given and received.

According to [What's Your Grief](#), a website that aims to provide resources and education to help and cope with grief and loss, there are



several different types of love you can consider as you begin this reframing, including the love of friends and family, love of community and making a difference, and self-love.

Friends and Family

The people in your life who help you feel good, feel loved, and feel connected to the world are some of the most important people in your life. Here are some things you can do to shift your Valentine's Day focus to your friends and family:

- **Ask friends who also have lost someone to join you in a fun activity.** Consider a movie night, game night, karaoke trip, or even a trip to the local comedy club. The fun distraction can make a world of difference for the entire group.

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- **Invite a few people to join you for a small dinner party or other get-togethers.** Focus on things like fun plans for future events, happy memories, or group members' hobbies and interests.
- **Ask your adult children or your grandchildren to choose an activity for you to do together.** It can be natural to talk about the person who is missing in your family activity, but it can also be a great time to reminisce together and remember your spouse or partner.
- **Call a close friend or family member and invite them to join you for a quiet night at home.** Let them know you're feeling down and need a little company. Try not to feel guilty about expressing your grief – they will understand.

Community

Supporting your community or a cause you believe in is an excellent way to spend time and connect with others, especially as you cope with feelings of grief. Consider these areas:

- **Try volunteering** with an organization or charity that your spouse would have supported and do it in their honor.
- **Joining a group can be very helpful.** Search for organizations that center on topics you have an interest in. This can be something like a church group, cultural club, or gardening club. An activity you enjoy with like-minded people can be a great way to find a connection and shift your attention to something positive.
- **Consider joining a bereavement or other grief support group in your community.**

Intrepid USA Healthcare Services can help you discover options in your area.

- **Plan to do one or more acts of kindness on the day.** Doing something for someone else can have a tremendous impact on your mood and outlook, no matter how big or small the action is.

You

Taking care of yourself and your needs is never a bad idea. Above all, you need to be sure the choices you make to cope with Valentine's Day have your emotional, mental, and physical health front and center. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- **Treat yourself.** While being mindful of your budget, it can feel great to treat yourself to something that makes you happy, whether that be something slow and quiet like a massage or big and loud like a theme park visit with friends or family.
- **Set aside time to do something that helps you cope with grief.** This can be exercise, journaling, yoga, making art, or anything else that helps you to feel centered.
- **Be sure not to take on an activity you don't feel up to.**

Spending the Day with Your Grief

While not everyone you know may understand it, there is no timeline for mourning the loss of a loved one. Grief for a lost spouse can last a very long time. It can also fade and unexpectedly resurface with triggers like special events, reminders of shared experiences, or even nothing at all.

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It is OK if you want to spend the day with your feelings. Sometimes it can feel a lot better – or even a little cathartic – to choose to feel the grief. Know that you won't be alone in this choice. Many people hate the holiday and are miserable until it has passed. Try doing something that may make you feel close to your deceased spouse. Some ideas to do this are:

- Remembering your spouse or partner and being present in those memories.
- Allow your feelings of grief to wash over you. Cry for as long as you need.
- If there are special rituals you and your loved one shared, allow yourself to engage in them.

Honor Your Loved One

If you do something special in memory of your spouse, it can go a long way toward healing and being able to face the day. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- **Call up memories of life together.** This can look like going through old photos, making their favorite meal, watching their favorite movie, or listening to their favorite song.
- **Visit your spouse's graveside** and leave fresh flowers or another meaningful decoration.
- **Plant a tree** in his or her honor or donate blood in their memory.
- **Write a letter to your loved one.** Think about all the ways they made you happy and how the two of you loved each other, remember the romantic moments you shared.

Avoiding the Day

When it feels better to avoid Valentine's Day altogether, it's fine to pretend the day isn't happening at all. Turn away from the jewelry, cards, and chocolates. Pretend the young woman waiting beside you at the doctor's office isn't talking about her romantic plans on her cell phone. If avoidance feels good to you, plan to spend the day doing something at home that you enjoy. This can be bingeing your favorite TV show, reading a great book, immersing yourself in an online foreign language class, or picking up the craft that's been gathering dust in the corner. Plan to indulge yourself with your favorite food (but be sure to continue following any physician-recommended dietary restrictions.)

Plan to go about your day normally and treat it as you would any other day. But if feelings of grief emerge, it's also acceptable to make room for those and cope with the feelings in healthy ways. Regardless of how you choose to spend the day, it's important to accept that whatever you are feeling is well-founded, from happiness to deep grief. Your grief may not look like anyone else's but know that your feelings are valid and normal.

To learn how you or your loved one may benefit from in-home services, [contact Intrepid USA](#) for more information.