

The death of a parent is a life-altering loss regardless of your age when it occurs. Dealing with this loss can be challenging any day of the year, but it is especially difficult during holidays and special occasions. Having a whole day dedicated to celebrating mothers when you are missing your own can make your loss feel that much bigger and harder to bear and may bring forward feelings that are difficult to express. The goal of this resource is to provide you with encouragement and ideas for how to approach Mother's Day after the death of your mom.

## Managing Expectations & Taking Care of Yourself

Holidays can be accompanied by lots of traditions and expectations for joy, love, and togetherness, which can often be further fueled by images and messaging we receive from social media, movies, and television. When you are grieving it is important to recognize that you will experience the holidays differently without your loved one who died.

Have **compassion for yourself** and be gentle with your expectations for yourself, your family, and others on this day. You might choose to commemorate your mother on this day, or you might decide to give yourself a "grief break" by not marking the holiday and trying to treat the day as a typical day.

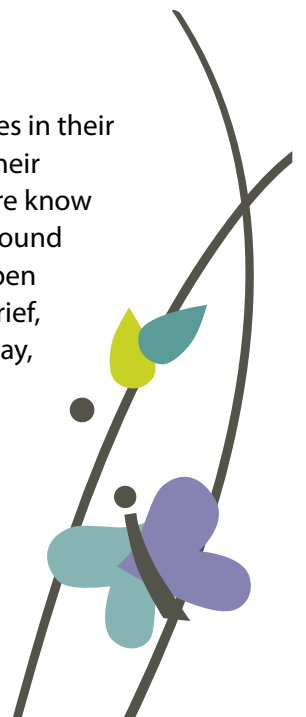
Try to practice **open communication** with others by clearly expressing your wishes and what you think you need on this holiday. Do not expect others around you to know what you need without telling them. It is normal and OK for your needs on Mother's Day to be different than those of other grieving family members. All grief is unique, so try not to compare your grief experience to others.

**Plan ahead** prior to the holiday and brainstorm ways that you can reduce stress, create meaning, and cultivate additional support if needed. Write down coping skills that help you manage difficult feelings and safe people you can call upon when you're having a hard time. Having this written plan before Mother's Day arrives may help you to feel more prepared for whatever comes on the holiday.

**Engage in self-care** as needed, allowing yourself the opportunity to recharge during a time when emotions might naturally be higher.

## Supporting Grieving Children on Mother's Day

After the death of their mother, grieving children may experience new emotions and changes in their grief experience as the Mother's Day holiday approaches. They may be hesitant to express their grief in order to protect family members from their feelings. Let grieving children in your care know that it is OK for them to talk about their feelings, even if it may bring up sadness for those around them. Family members can work together to support each other with their grief feelings. Open family communication about the holiday can offer children the opportunity to share their grief, create a plan for coping with the holiday, and brainstorm ways to honor their mom on the day, if they choose.



# Preparing for Mother's Day

Family members may try to avoid talking about a loved one who died in an effort to shelter children from difficult feelings, but it can actually be helpful for adults to model speaking about their grief feelings, experiences, and memories of their deceased loved one. Doing so will help to create a safe space for children to talk about their mother and will help show them that the connection they have with her is still present and strong. You may decide to have a specific time for a family meeting or an informal conversation about feelings or what the holiday will be like. Model how to talk about feelings, for example: "I'm feeling sad thinking about Mother's Day without Mom. What are you feeling about the holiday coming up?" Discuss the difficult feelings your children may feel. Allow them to talk openly about their feelings and let them know that these feelings are normal.

Know that it is also OK if your child chooses not to talk about their mom. They will still benefit from your open communication honoring her memory and they will learn that it is OK to share if and when they are ready.

Sometimes the anxiety or sadness we experience about an upcoming holiday can become bigger and more overwhelming than the actual day itself. Acknowledging these feelings may help make them more manageable.

## Ways to Honor and Remember Your Loved One

There are many ways you can choose to honor and remember your mother on Mother's Day. Doing something that feels meaningful to you is the most important thing. Below is a list of ideas to foster connection and memorialization on Mother's Day.

- Talk about your mother and say her name aloud.
- Look at family photos.
- Plant a flower or tree in memory of your mother.
- Buy a bouquet of flowers in her honor.
- Wear something that belonged to your mother (clothing, hat, jewelry).
- Do something your mother enjoyed doing (playing a game, taking a walk, reading a book).
- Cook your mother's favorite food and have a meal in her honor.
- Watch your mother's favorite movie.
- Write a letter to your mother telling her your thoughts and wishes.
- Light a candle in her honor.

Give yourself permission to try one of these activity ideas on Mother's Day, knowing that it might feel hard. Know that it is always OK to take a "grief break" and simply "get through" the holiday if it feels like too much to memorialize this Mother's Day. Consider creating a new tradition for yourself and your family this Mother's Day, maybe one that doesn't have any direct connection with the day itself. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, so do what you need to do to take care of yourself and your family on this holiday.

**We hope that this resource will be a helpful tool for you and your family on Mother's Day. Please be kind to yourself as you navigate this holiday. If you are interested in additional grief counseling support, call Transitions GriefCare at 919.719.7199.**



## *I Miss You*

**I miss you visiting favorite places  
I miss you going to new spaces**

**I miss you late into the night  
I miss you at dawn's first light**

**I miss you when sadness is around  
I miss you when joy is found**

**I miss you when the lights come on  
I miss you when the day is done**

**I miss you on your special day  
I miss you like it was yesterday**

**I miss you at no special time  
I miss you today with every rhyme.**

**Tanya Lord (thegriefftoolbox.com)**



### Our Family Plan for Mother's Day

Time of Day	What we would like to do

### Things we don't want to do on Mother's Day



### Our Plan for Self Care

Family Member	Things that will help me with feelings on Mother's Day

### What I would like to say if people ask me about Mother's Day

Family Member	What I will say to others

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

It's been \_\_\_\_\_ since you died. If you were here, I would tell you \_\_\_\_\_

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And you would tell me \_\_\_\_\_

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I am so proud that I've \_\_\_\_\_

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I know you would want me to \_\_\_\_\_

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I will never forget you. My favorite way to remember you is \_\_\_\_\_

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If grief has taught me anything, it's \_\_\_\_\_

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Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_

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Love, \_\_\_\_\_





## Conversation Prompts

Here are some conversation prompts to share memories about Mom. You might cut them out and take turns selecting one to share, or toss a coin and see where it lands!

Share a food that reminds you of Mom.	Share an activity you enjoyed doing with Mom.	Share the ways you are like Mom.
Share a way Mom made you laugh.	Share a favorite holiday you spent with Mom.	Share something important you learned from Mom.
Share the things you do to feel close and connected to Mom.	Share a smell that reminds you of Mom.	Share a memory of Mom.
Share an object or item that makes you think of Mom.	Share Mom's favorite pastime or hobby.	Share some things Mom was good at.
Share Mom's favorite colors.	Share the things Mom loved about you.	Share a place that helps you to feel close to Mom.