

# When you're not going home for the holidays

No matter the reason you can't spend the holidays at home with family, missing out on traditions or bonding time can lead to sadness, frustration and guilt. Faced with the messaging that this time of year is about being with loved ones, celebrating without family can be painful. And yet, there are still ways to enjoy the holidays in spite of difficult emotions. The below tips and suggestions may prove helpful as you journey through the season on your own.

## Family from afar

If you aren't going home but still want to spend time with family, find other ways to celebrate with them.

- **Plan an "alternate" holiday.** Find a time later in the year to celebrate if you can't return home for the holidays. Sometimes, it can be just as exciting knowing you can still participate in the family fun, just not on the specific holiday.
- **Go virtual.** Even if you can't interact in-person with your loved ones, technology can come in handy. Try using Skype or FaceTime to connect or plan a time to call on the phone. Seeing loved ones faces or hearing familiar voices and sounds can make you feel as if you were there with family.
- **Communicate your feelings.** Whether you feel sad, guilty or relieved about not going home, your feelings are valid. If you feel comfortable doing so, share concerns with your family as their reassurance might help ease worries.
- **Be firm in your decision.** If you're feeling the pressure from family members to come home but know it's not possible or in your best interests, remind yourself that it's okay to make the best choice for you.

## Coping with loss

The holidays can be an especially difficult time for those grieving a loss.

- **Use healthy distractions.** It might prove painful to reminisce about those you can't be with. If this is the case, try distracting yourself by taking up a new hobby or attending favorite events.
- **Honor your loved one's memory.** If you wish to celebrate, you can find ways to enjoy pastimes that acknowledge who's missing. For example, you can set a place for them at the table or make a toast in their name.
- **Take your time.** There is no timeline for grief, and healing from loss is a challenging process. Focus on one day at a time and reach out for support if needed.

## Alternatives to going home

Home is where the heart is, as the saying goes, and there are plenty of ways to find "home" wherever you are.

- wherever you are and with whomever you celebrate.
- **Try volunteering.** Helping those in need can provide a distraction and help you identify with a bigger cause.
- **Celebrate with friends.** For some, family can bring forth unpleasant emotions, but friends can be family too. If you choose not to go home for the holidays, enjoy them with people in your support system instead.

## The holiday toolkit



- **Make the holidays your own.** There is no right or wrong way to celebrate. Excuse yourself from guilt and enjoy this time of year in a way that works for your emotional health. Indulge in self-care, catch up on sleep or treat yourself to a festive dinner.

Not going home can limit your support system, and if you find yourself grappling with emotions such as loneliness or guilt, don't be afraid to reach out for assistance from a mental health profession or your employee or member assistance program.

## The holiday toolkit

