

Thanksgiving Grief: Finding Gratitude When You're Anything but Grateful

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HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL DAYS : LITSA WILLIAMS

Up until now, I have been in full-on denial about the holidays approaching. But Halloween has come and gone. My job started a holiday food drive last week. My mom called me yesterday to start talking logistics about Thanksgiving. And today, I noticed all the stores had their holiday displays out in full force.

The time has come to acknowledge, the holidays are coming. There, I said it. It's official. This is my public acknowledgment that the holidays are going to be here sooner rather than later, along with my Thanksgiving grief.

Last month we posted [64 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Grief](#), and on that list, we said: "holidays will be hard forever." I was struck by the number of people who commented, saying they could relate to that item specifically.

On social media, someone said, *"I deluded myself into thinking that after the first year, the holidays would go back to being normal and happy. 7 years later, I now realize the holidays will always have some pain, and, just like everything else, nothing goes back to normal."* I couldn't have said it better myself.

The holidays are a reminder of the people who are missing from our holiday celebrations. Their absence is always felt, even as the years pass. Sure it gets easier...or maybe we just get used to the sadness.

We see images everywhere of what the holidays are supposed to look like – perfect families full of perfect holiday cheer. Yet our reality looks so different. Someone important is missing, the family is changed, traditions have been lost, sometimes there's a financial strain, pain, and conflict.

Thanksgiving grief can color the lens through which we see things, keeping us fixated on loss and pain above all else. I know I am looking through a gray, dingy lens these days, and I have a strong feeling I am not alone. So today, the plan is simple: find gratitude.

It only seems appropriate, with Thanksgiving around the corner, we should at least try to adjust our frame of mind by looking for some good. It may sound cheesy, but here is what I'm going to do to get my holiday season off to a better start: I'm going to find one thing I am grateful for every day.

I know there will be moments when I'm overwhelmed by stress and generalized holiday gloom. Still, from tomorrow until Thanksgiving, I commit to take at least a few minutes every day to reflect on the things I am thankful for.

This isn't a big undertaking. It's attainable, and it works. Humans have an incredible ability to fixate on the negative ([you can even read about our negative bias, from an evolutionary perspective](#)). So breaking up all that negativity with positive thoughts about the people, places, and things we love can be a refreshing and much-needed shift in thinking.

Plus, looking for gratitude slows us down. Instead of rushing past the little things, it encourages us to take the time to appreciate and savor them. It helps us re-frame things for ourselves – looking at the positive instead of the negative.

I know this can seem impossible when you feel crushed under the weight of the negative. Luckily the interwebs are full of resources aimed at inspiring us to be grateful (in an un-annoying way)

CCA Bereavement editor's note: *Please view these two short videos. If you have no internet, go to the library and view it from a computer or ask a friend to play it from their smart phone. It will be worth it!*

We have shared Louie Schwartzberg before, but it seems impossible to talk about cultivating gratitude without sharing this video.

<https://youtu.be/gXDMoiEkyuQ> (Length of video 9:55)

And leave it to the folks at SoulPancake to prove to us why expressing our gratitude can actually increase our happiness.

<https://youtu.be/oHv6vTKD6lg> (Length of video 7:13)

Share your gratitudes with us on Social Media using the hashtag #whatsyourgratitude. Comment. Subscribe.

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/thanksgiving-grief-finding-gratitude-youre-anything-grateful/>

CCA Bereavement editor's note: *Group activity and home activity. This would be a great Thanksgiving and Christmas family activity.*

1. Who influenced you the most? How? Use examples and WRITE IT DOWN. What does this person mean to you?
2. Call this person and read it to them. If person is deceased, share it with someone connected to them or someone who needs some inspiration.
3. What are you grateful for?