

BEYOND SEPTEMBER™ · FREE GUIDE

When Someone Is Missing

A gentle guide to the holidays after a suicide loss

THE SUN RISES AGAIN.

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Before you begin

The holidays may bring a sharper sense of who is missing. Familiar songs, an empty chair, a family photograph, or a question you were not expecting can carry more than others realize.

You do not have to make this season look like previous years. You do not have to feel grateful, festive, hopeful, or ready. You can love someone deeply and still want a break from thinking about the loss. You can enjoy a moment without leaving them behind.

This guide offers choices, not a set of steps you must complete. Take what fits, leave what does not, and come back only if you want to. It is written with suicide loss in mind, though some ideas may also fit other losses. You do not need to explain how your person died to use it.

If you need support right now — United States:

Call or text 988: Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

You can reach out for emotional distress, even if you are not sure you are in a crisis. For immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. Outside the United States, contact your local emergency service or crisis line.

Beyond September offers awareness and educational resources. We are not a therapy, medical, crisis, or peer-support provider. This guide is not a substitute for individual care.

1. Let this year be different

After a suicide loss, grief may sit alongside unanswered questions, anger, guilt, relief, numbness, or feelings you do not have a name for. You do not have to resolve those feelings before the holidays arrive. This guide cannot tell you why your person died, and you do not owe anyone an explanation.

You might keep a tradition, change it, skip it, or decide on the day. Different people in the same family may need different things. A quieter holiday is not a failure. Neither is a holiday with laughter in it.

Consider choosing just one thing you want to keep and one thing you want permission to leave out.

Something I might keep: _____

Something I can skip or change: _____

Something I do not need to decide yet: _____

2. Make a small, flexible plan

You do not need a plan for the entire season. Start with the next gathering, meal, or difficult date.

You could:

- Attend for a shorter time rather than the whole event.
- Arrange your own ride or agree on a way to leave early.
- Choose one person who knows you may need a quiet break.
- Ask someone else to handle hosting, shopping, or a tradition this year.
- Plan something simple for afterward: food, rest, a familiar show, or a call with someone you trust.
- Decline an invitation and choose a quieter way to spend the day, with a check-in if that would help.

Changing your mind is allowed. A plan should make room for you, not become another demand.

My next difficult day or gathering: _____

What might make it more manageable: _____

Who I can ask for practical help: _____

How I can take a break or leave: _____

3. Have a few words ready

Sometimes finding the words is harder than making the decision. These are suggested phrases you can adapt — not quotations from other survivors.

For invitations

“Thank you for including me. I may come for a little while, but I cannot promise yet.”

“I am keeping things smaller this year. Please ask me again another time.”

For questions you do not want to answer

“I do not want to talk about the details. I would rather tell you something about their life.”

“I appreciate that you care. I am not ready to discuss that.”

For something hurtful or unhelpful

“I know you want to help. What I need right now is someone to listen, not explain it.”

For asking for company

“This week feels hard. Could you check in with me on Thursday?”

“Could we spend some time together without making it a holiday celebration?”

You may share their name, your relationship, or a memory without sharing the circumstances of their death. Privacy is not dishonesty.

4. Remember them in a way that belongs to you

Your person was more than the way they died. If remembering feels right, you might make space for an ordinary detail: their laugh, a favorite meal, a habit, a song, or a story that sounds like them.

Some options are:

- Make a favorite recipe or write it down for someone else.
- Place a photograph nearby, or keep it somewhere private.
- Invite people to share a memory, with permission to pass.
- Write a letter that nobody else needs to read.
- Take a walk somewhere meaningful.
- Keep an existing decoration, or make a simple one from paper.
- Do nothing visible and remember them quietly.

You do not need to buy anything, post publicly, or create a new ritual to honor them. A keepsake is an option — not a measure of love. If remembering feels too much today, you can set it aside.

One thing about them I want to remember: _____

A private or shared way I might make room for that: _____

If you choose to share a name or memory online, consider your own privacy and the wishes of others whose names or photographs appear. Beyond September’s [Wall](#) is an optional place to submit a remembrance note. Notes are reviewed before publication; it is not a live conversation or a place to seek urgent help. Sharing there is never required.

5. When children or family members grieve differently

One person may want to say their name at dinner. Another may need a break from talking about the loss. Children may move between sadness and play. Those differences do not tell you how much someone loved the person.

Before a gathering, ask what each person wants rather than assuming everyone wants the same ritual. Give people a way to opt out without explaining themselves.

For children, keep explanations simple, truthful, and suited to their age. Avoid descriptions that could confuse death with ordinary sleep. You do not need to share graphic details. Invite questions, and allow “I do not know” when that is the honest answer. A qualified professional experienced in childhood bereavement can help you find appropriate language and support.

If you are supporting someone else, ask before sharing their story, arranging a public tribute, or posting a photograph. Offer something specific: a meal, a ride, help with errands, or company. Follow through on what you offer.

“Would you like to talk about them today, or would you rather have some company?” leaves room for either answer.

6. When a moment becomes too much

If you feel overwhelmed, it may help to pause what you are doing, move somewhere quieter, notice your surroundings, and contact someone you trust. You do not need to stay at a gathering to protect other people from discomfort.

For an ordinary hard moment, you might try a drink of water, something to eat, a short rest, or a little fresh air. These are small comforts, not treatment, and they may not be enough on their own.

If you are struggling to cope, consider reaching out to a qualified mental health professional or a suicide-loss support organization. You do not have to wait until things become unbearable to ask.

If thoughts of suicide arise or you feel unable to stay safe:

Call or text 988: Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Tell someone you trust that you need help now, and ask them to stay with you while you reach support. For immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

The Wall, website contact form, and social-media comments are not emergency services. Do not wait for a response there if you need immediate help.

A small plan to keep nearby

You can fill this in privately, save it on your phone, or skip it. It is a holiday planning prompt — not a clinical safety plan. Keep personal contact details out of any copy you share publicly.

PROMPT

MY NOTE

A date or situation I want to prepare for

One thing I can say no to

One thing that might bring comfort

Someone I can ask to check in

What I can say when I need a break

A practical task I can ask someone to help with

Keep nearby: Call or text 988: Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (United States).

Support beyond this guide

There is no deadline for seeking support. You may want it soon after the loss, years later, or during a season that surprises you.

- **Beyond September — resources for suicide loss survivors:** beyondseptember.com/find-support/loss-survivors. A starting point for finding outside support resources.
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention — “I’ve lost someone”:** afsp.org/ive-lost-someone. Official suicide-loss resources.
- **International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day:** Saturday, **November 21, 2026**. If attending an event feels right, explore AFSP’s [Survivor Day](#) page. Check the specific event’s details before making plans. Participation is optional.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** 988lifeline.org. **Call or text 988: Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.**

External organizations provide their own services; listing them does not imply a partnership with Beyond September.

A closing thought

There is no required ending to this season. You do not have to emerge stronger, find a lesson, or make grief meaningful for someone else.

You are allowed to remember. You are allowed to rest. You are allowed to ask for company and to need something different tomorrow.

For everyone remembered here, and everyone still here.

The Sun Rises Again.

Beyond September™ · Questions about this educational guide: hello@beyondseptember.com. This inbox is not a crisis service.