Special occasions such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries after the death of a loved one to suicide are difficult. Individuals will experience a rollercoaster of emotions, and these emotions bubble up at different times. Know that the emotions you feel after the death of a loved one to suicide is different than other types of losses. Here are some tips for making it through those difficult days.

**Traditions**
Traditions can be continued, modified, or discontinued. It is a personal preference and there is no right or wrong answer. Some people find it beneficial to take a break from some traditions and pick them back up at a later date.

Some long-standing traditions may be too painful to continue. In this case, it may be a good idea to come up with new traditions. This way you aren’t reminded of those who are not present to continue the tradition with you, rather you are focused on the new one.

**Leading Up to the Event and the Event Itself**
For some individuals, the time leading up to the event may be painful, if not more, than the event itself. It is not uncommon to feel anxious around the time of the event; however, this does not mean that attending the event itself will be difficult. It is important to let people serve as a support system for you in the time surrounding the event and the event itself.

**Practice Self-Care**
It is important that you take care of yourself through this time by getting enough sleep, drinking enough water, practicing self-care and having a healthy lifestyle. Exercise, such as walking or yoga, can help to reduce your stress levels. It is important to engage in activities that you feel are restorative.

**Vocalize Your Needs Ahead of Time**
Family and friends want to help you, but need some direction and guidance. You will likely experience more support if you are clear about what you need. If you would like to be left alone, it is important to communicate that as well. By vocalizing your thoughts and feelings, you are likely to reduce your stress levels.

**Step Away**
Having an exit strategy if an event poses to be too much for you, can make you feel more at ease. Exit strategies are important to plan, whether you decide to use them or not. By communicating your exit strategy to others, they will be understanding when you leave. It may also be helpful to find an individual that you feel comfortable with enough to discuss how you are feeling in a more private manner.
Traveling
If you have friends or family members in different cities or states, it may be beneficial to visit them for a change of scenery or time away from home. Planning a trip or visiting a new place can shift your focus onto something else rather than the date itself.

Consider Volunteering
There are several volunteer opportunities that are available and can be found online in your area. Helping others can be a rewarding experience and a valuable way to honor your loved one or the date itself.

Stories from Other Suicide Loss Survivors
The following bullets include insights from various suicide loss survivors. It is important to note that everyone has their own way of grieving and this is no right or wrong way to do so.

• “I lost my brother December 20, 2002, so the holidays are especially sensitive for me. What I would say to someone newly grieving is to allow themselves to feel however they feel. You don’t need to subscribe to anyone else’s timeline to appease their comfort. Take the time you need to get through the holiday. If you have young children, as I did at the time of my loss, don’t be afraid to let them see you cry, it gives them permission to cry too - and those tears carry so much healing. Sending hugs and love your way, it never goes away, but I promise it gets softer.” - Sue K.

• “Don’t be afraid to feel. Feel sadness, feel anger, feel joy, loss, love. Never feel like you have to justify your emotions. Try not to dwell on the fact it’s holiday season (my dad killed himself three days before Thanksgiving). That first holiday for us was hard, as we were lost, and were still coming to grips with what was happening. Be thankful for those around you, especially the ones who reach out. This is hard for them too. The ones who really care may want to help but don’t know how. And you may not know how to accept their help. That’s OK. There’s no handbook for this kind of thing.” - Nikki J.

• “I would say the most important thing is to take time out and care for yourself; eat well, get some exercise, stay hydrated, minimize alcohol use. Don’t feel obligated to attend every party and event, just do what you can. Find a local support group in your area, and attend regularly. If your spiritual and attend church, keep going and ask for any resources there that can help you. Lean on ‘safe’ people during this time, and accept help from others. Try and find a good grief counselor. Don’t be afraid to cry, cry as much as you need to. Most important - make time alone, but don’t isolate yourself.” - Jessica C.

Source: American Foundation of Suicide Prevention