

Navigating the Holidays After Disaster

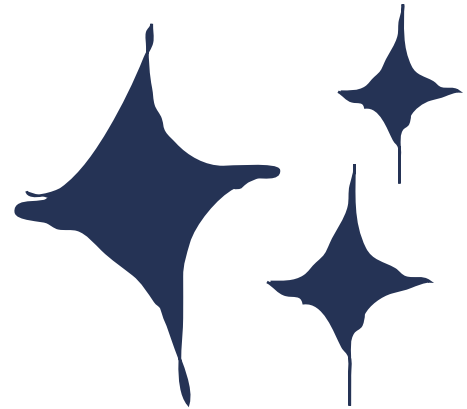
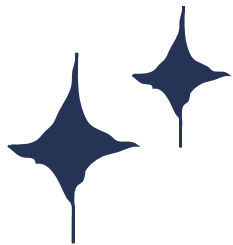
Based on the learning from disaster, we offer these tips with simple ways to care for yourself and others, honor what's been lost, and create meaningful moments.

Why holidays bring feelings, and can be helpful to healing:

Reflection at key points is how we stitch the story back together.

Recovery is about emotional healing but it's also the process and rebuilding the story of your life – your narrative. (A wonderful friend of mine, Dr Rob Gordon from Australia, reminds us of this).

A disaster is not just an event that causes damage to the physical — it **breaks the continuity of your life**. The plans you had, the assumptions you held, the identity you lived through... all get disrupted. Your life no longer lines up neatly with the “story” you were in before the event.



People aren't just healing emotionally after disaster — they're also doing the deeper cognitive and narrative work of trying to answer:

- What happened to me?
- What does it mean for the life I thought I was living?
- What kind of person am I now?
- How does my future make sense in light of what happened?

This is why holidays, anniversaries, and other milestones can feel emotional. They naturally make you look back and notice the gap between “how life was” and “how life is now.” This reflection helps your mind sort through the disruption, understand what's changed, and start building a new, coherent story you can live in again.

This reflection is difficult and often painful, but it helps the story become whole again. That reflection isn't a setback — it's part of how we slowly stitch the story back together, make sense of what's changed, and build a new, coherent narrative we can live in again. And these natural reflection points help in noticing progress you might otherwise miss.

Tips for Navigating Holidays and Milestones After a Disaster

1. Be gentle with yourself and others

Give yourself and others space and grace for the feelings that may emerge. You may feel a range of things, including joy and sadness.

2. Recovery looks different for everyone

Everyone's recovery is very personal. What works for one person might not feel right for another. Check in with each other to understand what everyone needs, and plan together how to navigate these differences with care and flexibility.

3. Adapt routines and traditions

Reclaim or adapt traditions where you can, and/or consider creating new ones. For example, if cherished ornaments are gone, consider gathering family or community for a crafting session, or invite friends and loved ones to contribute decorations from afar. Together, these pieces become a collection associated with new memories filled with care and love.

4. Limit unhelpful exposure

Avoid repeatedly revisiting debates, media coverage, or graphic images about the disaster. Only engage with what truly helps you process.

5. Check in with yourself and recharge wherever you can

Where you can, schedule time for self-care, quiet, or breaks, and listen to your body - notice your emotional and physical responses.

6. Connect intentionally

Spend time with supportive family and friends, but wherever possible, set boundaries and be honest about what you need.

7. Honor how far you've come

Take a moment to acknowledge what you've endured, what you've achieved, and the challenges you've faced. Even if progress feels small, recognize that you're still standing.

8. Reach out if needed

If things feel overwhelming, recognize that you've been through a lot, and reach out to a counselor, psychologist, or trusted professional for some extra help.

Yes, recovery involves rebuilding the physical, but it's also deeply human and includes reflection and ongoing work of piecing your story back together.

