FINDING THE WORDS:

A Holiday Conversation Guide

FOR WIDOWS AND THEIR LOVED ONES



A GENTLE GUIDE FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Finding the Words

A Holiday Conversation Guide for Widows and Their Loved Ones

> You are allowed to celebrate, step away, change traditions, ask for company, or choose a quiet day. There is no single right way to move through the holidays after loss.

The holidays can bring warmth, memories, difficult moments, and sometimes all of those things in a single afternoon. It can be hard to explain what you need, especially when you are still figuring it out yourself.

This guide offers simple words to borrow when your own are hard to find. Use what fits, leave what doesn't, and remember: you can change your mind.

With care,
Donna Kendrick

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It’s okay to say what you need

You do not owe anyone a long explanation. A kind, clear sentence is enough.

When you want to decline an invitation

> “Thank you for thinking of me. I’m going to keep things quiet this year, but it means a lot to be included.”

When you want to attend, but need flexibility

> “I’d love to come. I may only stay for a little while, and I hope that’s okay.”

When you want to be included

> “I’m not sure what I’ll feel up to, but I’d really appreciate being invited. It helps to know I have the option.”

When you want to remember your spouse

> “I’d love for us to share a story about [name] at dinner. It would mean a lot to me to hear everyone’s memories.”

When you need a little space

> “I’m glad to be here. I may step outside for a few minutes if I need a breather.”

You can be grateful for an invitation and still say no. You can enjoy yourself and still miss someone deeply. Both can be true.

How to offer support without pressure

You do not need perfect words. A thoughtful invitation, a specific offer, or simply making room for someone's feelings can matter.

Invite, and leave room for a no

> "We would love to have you with us. There's no pressure at all, and you're welcome to decide closer to the day."

Offer something specific

> "I'm making dinner on Sunday. Could I drop a portion by, or would you rather come eat with us?"

Make room for their loved one's memory

> "I was remembering [name] today. Would you like to hear the story?"

When they decline

> "Of course. Thank you for telling me. I'll be thinking of you, and I'll keep including you in future invitations."

When you are not sure what helps

> "Would company feel good right now, or would a quiet check-in by text be better?"

> A gentle reminder: Don't assume that someone wants to be alone—or that they want company. Ask, listen, and let their answer be enough.

You can make a different choice

Grief does not follow a calendar. Something that sounded manageable last week may feel different today.

If you need to cancel

> "I thought I'd be up for it, but I'm having a harder day than expected. I need to stay home. Thank you for understanding."

If you want to adjust a tradition

> "I know we've always done it this way. This year, could we try something a little simpler?"

If you need someone to reach out

> "I've been feeling a little disconnected lately. Would you have time for a walk or coffee this week?"

If you want a new kind of holiday

> "I'm thinking about volunteering or doing something different this year. Would you be interested in joining me?"

If you are looking for connection

Consider a local widow or grief support group, a library program, a faith or community gathering if that fits your life, or a volunteer opportunity. Start with one small step; you do not have to fill every day.

Helping others may bring purpose and connection, but you never need to stay busy to prove you are doing well. Rest is meaningful, too.

What would help me this holiday season

You can fill in these prompts and share them with someone you trust—or simply use them to think through what you need.

One tradition I would like to keep:

Something I may want to do differently:

One way you could support me:

If I change my mind about plans, I would appreciate:

One way I would like to remember my loved one:

> "I may not know exactly what I need every day. Thank you for being patient with me, continuing to include me, and letting me be honest about how I'm feeling."

You do not have to find the perfect words. You only need words that feel true to you.