Practical Suggestions:

Adapted from Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Savor the Moment  This holiday season, take what you need from the holidays—moment by moment—and discard the rest.
*Carpe Diem:* Right now, turn off your mind and attend to the moment. Pay attention to what you are hearing, tasting, smelling, seeing, feeling on your skin. Savor the sensation of life.

Keep What Matters  You may wish to simplify your holiday rituals. Keep the traditions that matter most to you and set the others aside, at least for now.
*Carpe Diem:* Make a list of all your holiday traditions and circle those that you think are most essential.

Attend to Your Spirit  Mourning is a spiritual journey of the heart and soul. And the holidays are a spiritual time of year. Together the two demand your spiritual time and attention.
*Carpe Diem:* Where do you feel most spiritually connected to the person who died? Go there today and feel her presence.

Receive Ongoing Support from Others  When friends and family reach out to you during the holidays, accept their support. Let them spend time with you and take care of you. You need their help and they need to give it.
*Carpe Diem:* Sometimes your friends want to support you but don’t know how. Call your closest friend today and ask him or her to help you through the holidays. Suggest specifically how he or she could most help.

Focus on Relationships  Focus on the people, not the “production” of the season.
*Carpe Diem:* This year, instead of making a holiday gift list, make a holiday relationship list. Write down the names of the special people in your life and next to teach name, write something you can do for or with that person that will strengthen your relationship.

Ask for the Gift of Memory  Tell your friends and family that in lieu of gifts this holiday, you’d like them each to write down special memories of the person who died. These notes or letters will become mementos your family will treasure forever.
*Carpe Diem:* Talk to your friends and family today about your special holiday gift request.

Laugh  Laughter restores hope and assists us in surviving the pain of grief. (A good laugh also gets our “abs” and lungs a good work-out!)
*Carpe Diem:* Close your eyes and picture the precious smile of the person who died. Hear her laughter. Smile back.

Fill the Empty Chair  The thought of an empty chair at the holiday table is painful. This year, give some thought to these options: Fill the chair with friend or neighbor. Designate the chair as a “Chair of Honor,” and invite a guest to sit there. Or simply leave it empty as an expression of honoring your grief this year.
*Carpe Diem:* Frame small photos of those who have died and use them as part of your holiday centerpiece.

Light a Candle  Candles are a lovely part of the holidays in many homes. The light of a candle can help us center our thoughts on our loved one.
*Carpe Diem:* Shop for a special memory candle today.

Establish Your Own Private Ritual  With the hustle and bustle of the season, you may need to be intentional with your grief work. A daily ritual of remembrance (lighting a candle, reading a meditation, looking at photographs) may give you a much needed release of feelings…rather than holding or “stuffing” them inside of you.
*Carpe Diem:* What private ritual might be a holiday grief touchstone for you, this year and in years to come? Brainstorm a list of possibilities.

Make a Memory Display  As part of your holiday decorating this year, why not create a special display of photos and mementos of the person who died?
*Carpe Diem:* Choose a spot for the memory display and begin placing items there today.

Sing  While certain songs are likely to make you feel sad, know that experiencing and embracing your sadness helps you heal.
*Carpe Diem:* Today when you’re driving alone in your car, pop in a holiday CD and sing!

Prepare Favorite Holiday Foods of the Person Who Died…or Not  Special foods are central to most holiday dinners. Discuss the menu with family members. Attempt to reach some agreement on which foods to include…or avoid…this year. Ultimately, you may decide to plan a completely different dining experience this year.
*Carpe Diem:* Check in with your family to discuss personal preferences for the holiday meal.

Make a Toast  A new holiday tradition may be the inclusion of toasts that honor the deceased loved one.
*Carpe Diem:* Write down some thoughts for your toast, or ask another family member to prepare and deliver the toast.

Plan Something Special for After the Holidays  Having something to look forward to is an age-old trick that seems to work in many situations.
*Carpe Diem:* Get out your January calendar and make plans for something special.