



BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, AND MILESTONES

*When Meaningful Dates Bring Your Sibling's
Absence Into Focus*

Birthdays, anniversaries, and important milestones can bring a sibling's absence into sharp focus. A date on the calendar may hold years of memories, family traditions, private jokes, phone calls, cards, or plans you once expected to share. Even when you have been managing day-to-day life, a meaningful date can bring grief close again.

WHY CERTAIN DATES CAN FEEL SO POWERFUL

Special dates connect us to both memory and expectation. You may remember how your sibling celebrated a birthday, what they usually said or did on a holiday, or where they would have been during an important family event. At the same time, you may feel the loss of future moments that will now happen without them.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- You may begin thinking about the date days or weeks before it arrives.
- You may feel sadness, anxiety, irritability, longing, or unexpected tenderness as the day approaches.
- A milestone can feel bittersweet when you are proud or happy and deeply aware that your sibling is not there to share it.

GENTLE REMINDER

A difficult anniversary or milestone does not mean you are going backward in your grief. Meaningful dates can reconnect you with love, memory, and the reality of the loss.

PLANNING FOR A MEANINGFUL DATE

It can help to think ahead about what you may need. You might choose to spend the day with family, keep your plans simple, visit a meaningful place, take time alone, or create a small remembrance. You do not have to decide far in advance, and you are allowed to change your plans if the day feels different than you expected.

WHEN OTHERS DO NOT REMEMBER THE DATE

It can hurt when a date that feels significant to you passes unnoticed by others. Friends and extended family may not realize that your sibling's birthday, death anniversary, or another milestone carries special meaning. If you want support, consider telling someone ahead of time. A simple message such as, "This week may be hard for me," can help others understand what you need.

A DEEPER LOOK

Milestones are not limited to birthdays or the anniversary of a death. Weddings, graduations, births, retirements, family reunions, vacations, new homes, and other life changes can bring thoughts of your sibling. You may imagine what they would have said, where they would have sat, or how they would have participated.



WHEN JOY AND GRIEF ARRIVE TOGETHER

- A happy event can still contain grief. You may feel genuine joy for yourself or someone you love while also wishing your sibling were present. These feelings do not cancel each other out. Love allows room for celebration and missing someone at the same time.
- You may choose to include your sibling in a milestone through a photograph, favorite song, piece of jewelry, story, toast, flower, private ritual, or another meaningful symbol. You may also choose not to do anything outwardly. Remembrance can be quiet.
- What feels comforting one year may feel different the next. There is no required way to mark a birthday, anniversary, or milestone, and there is no timetable for when these dates should become easier.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Your sibling may be missing from the photograph, the celebration, or the phone call, but they remain part of the history and love you carry into each new chapter.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

CARRYING YOUR SIBLING INTO FUTURE MILESTONES

Your sibling's physical absence may be especially noticeable on important days, but the relationship remains part of your life story. Memories, values, traditions, and the ways your sibling influenced you can continue to accompany you into future milestones. You can honor that connection while also allowing yourself to keep living, growing, celebrating, and creating new memories.

Not every grief trigger appears on the calendar. A child's graduation, a family announcement, a personal achievement, or an ordinary moment may suddenly remind you that your sibling is missing from something you expected to share. When that happens, give yourself permission to notice the feeling rather than judging yourself for having it.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

Which birthday, anniversary, or future milestone feels especially important to you? Is there a way you would like to remember or include your sibling when that day arrives?

CREATING A NEW FAMILY BALANCE

A family does not return to exactly what it was before a sibling died. Over time, however, it can find a different balance. Allow yourself to remain who you are rather than feeling that you must become the person who died. Your sibling's place in the family was unique, and so is yours.

With heartfelt compassion,
Linda Findlay
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