

Living Happier Healthier Holidays

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The holiday season is portrayed by many as a time of happiness and joy. However, during this time many people are filled with sadness. This sadness can lead to feeling "holiday depression". Due to the holiday season being filled with music in the air, plenty of shopping, food, and decorations all around, people who are suffering from the "holiday's blues" can fall under the radar.

This article is design to shed light on a segment of the population who might not find themselves in the mood to sing Christmas carols. They are really not in the mood for the holiday season. Honestly, without recognizing it, they can be suffering from the "holiday blues".

I can recall at times in my own personal life where the Christmas holidays had a bit of sting to them. Being the youngest of nine children and currently not having children on my own, the holiday season can seem, at times, sad for me. I can remember a particular time when the holiday season was not the best for me. My mother passed away in March of 2002. I had just started a new job. Therefore, that particular year when the holidays came around, I started to feel sad. Ideally during this time of the year, I would spend it with my mother laughing and sharing stories of the good ole days. Yes, my father was still living, but he was never really a person who celebrated holidays like the way my mother would. So, after her passing, there was this hole in my heart. However, I pretended to be happy, when deep down inside I was feeling lonely and sad. It was hard for me to articulate the pain I was feeling to those around me. I honestly did not want them to bear the brunt of my pain, nor, did I want how I was feeling to infect their joy for the holidays. So, like many others, I kept quiet and suffered in silence. This was not because I had too but because I chose too. However, I did manage to push through that year and with time, things are better now.

I must confess that if I had not been intentional, I could easily be in that place of sadness each holiday season. Personally, I make a special effort to take care of my emotional health during the holiday season. Now that my father is also deceased, and I am a parentless and childless human being, I have to ensure that I am able to find some joy within the holiday season. Nevertheless, I am grateful to be surrounded by family and friends who put forth a special effort to reach out to me during the holiday season. Unfortunately, for many that is not their scenario.

Generally speaking, many people start their holiday celebration at Thanksgiving. It blends right into the Christmas season. There can be weeks where a large degree of our population are suffering in silence. We live in a culture where the holidays are centered on family and friends sitting around having a good time. However, for people where this not their reality, this can be a very lonely time for them.

Usually during the holidays season we can expect to see an increase in suicides. Many of these individuals do not seek out help. Unfortunately, we live in a society that tend to overlook their pain, because we are so busy self-indulging in eating, shopping, exchanging gifts, and visiting with family and friends. It is imperative we take some time to think about those who might be having a hard time during the holiday season.

There are many reasons as to why people might be experiencing the “holiday blues”.

For example:

- Loss of a love one
- Recently divorced
- Loss of a significant relationship
- Loss of employment
- Distance between their love ones will not allow them to see each other
- Recently located to a new community where they are no strong social connections
- Major life style changes (i.e. marriage, new born baby, or retirement)
- Lack of financial resources
- Over-spending on gifts
- Trying to please others
- Overwhelmed with too many demands
- Family issues
- Trying to live out social media perceptions of what the holiday season should entail.

Below is a recommended list of thirty-five (35) things people can engage in to live a happier healthier holiday season. By no means am I suggesting this is an exhaustive list, but I will attest from my own personal experiences and that of a therapist. You will find these activities useful.

1. **Acknowledge how you are feeling:** Tell someone close to you what you are feeling. Be willing to talk it out, and know that it is okay to feel the way you do. Do not be afraid to cry if you have to.
2. **Connect with others:** Do not isolate yourself. Reach out to others by asking them what they are doing for the holidays. Invite yourself to their gatherings should you have to. Do not wait on others to invite you. This is not a season to be shy.
3. **Spend time with people who care about you:** I say this because this is a very vulnerable time for you. There is no need to place yourself in position to be in the company of people who don't have your best interest at heart.
4. **Learn to say no politely:** Do not feel like you have to accept every invitation that is offered to you. You do not want to feel over obligated.
5. **Arrange to spend time with family members:** I know getting together with family can be challenging at times due to the fact that there still might be some open wounds, previous pain, and unresolved issues. Let your family know you will be attending the event for joy, peace, and happiness. You will not be coming to a family therapist session.
6. **Establish a budget:** It is important you set a budget for the holidays to avoid “holiday blues” spending regrets. Make a list of the people you are going to purchase a gift for and decide how much you will spend on them. Stick to that agreement!
7. **Plan, Plan, Plan:** The holiday season can be filled with commitments and obligations. This may include shopping, cooking, or attending local events. You will have to preplan what, when, and how you are going to spend your time. Otherwise, you will be on a roller coaster running around feeling lost, tired, and exhausted.
8. **Avoid taking a vacation from your healthy eating habits:** It is really tempting this time of the year to get caught up in all the sugary foods, meats, breads, and drinks. Remember, the holiday is just one day and you will have to live with yourself the rest of the year.
9. **Maintain your exercise program:** During the holidays most people are off work and family and friends are visiting. You can easily find yourself sitting around eating, talking, and watching television. It can become very easy to forfeit your exercise routine. Be wise and make sure you schedule workout time during the holidays.

10. **Consider Volunteering:** There are plenty of ways you can serve others, so you do not have to be home alone. You can visit the nursing home, homeless shelter, battered women shelter, foster home, or veteran home.
11. **Go window shopping:** You do not have to make a purchase.
12. **Go to the movies:** This would be a great opportunity to watch a fun movie.
13. **Home movies entertainment:** You can stay home and rent your favorite movies to watch.
14. **Make time for yourself:** Pamper yourself by engaging in personal self-care. You might get a manicure, pedicure, or your hair done at a favorite salon.
15. **Make an "I am thankful list":** It is easy during the holiday season to get caught up in what you do not have. By creating an "I am thankful list", you can focus your attention on what you do have to be grateful for during this time of year.
16. **Create a new family holiday tradition:** Celebrating the holidays the way you did when you was a child can be exciting, but it also can bring back some painful memories. Therefore, having your own family personalized holiday tradition can be very rewarding.
17. **Honor your loss love one(s):** It is okay to remember and celebrate the person(s) you are missing during the holidays. You can honor them through a scholarship fund, planting a tree, or simply making a donation to one of their favorite non-profit organization. Additionally, you can play their favorite song(s) or create an ornament in their memory. It could be fun to have the family write letters to the person and read them aloud sharing fun memories of their love one(s). You may also want to light a candle in their honor as well.
18. **Create a giving day:** Giving is real popular during the holiday season. You might want to explore some very unorthodox ways you can give. This does not have to require money, especially when your finances are limited. You might wrap gifts for children who parents are in prison or offer to play Santa Claus at a local event.
19. **Create a creative cash day:** Should you have money, but still want to be a bit non-traditional, you can adopt a family in need. Find out what their needs are and surprise them on Christmas day by delivering them some unexpected gifts.
20. **Listen to your favorite Christmas music:** Play your favorite Christmas songs throughout the day.
21. **Contact long lost friend(s):** You can call, visit, or e-mail some friends you have not spoken with in a while.
22. **Schedule rest time:** Be sure to get plenty of rest during the holidays. Avoid over extending yourself.
23. **Attend church service:** Remember the real reason for the season is Jesus.
24. **Start a journal:** Writing about how you are feeling, how much you appreciate you, what you accomplished, and what goals you have for yourself in the future can be very therapeutic.
25. **Take a joy ride:** This is when you get in your car and drive with no destination in mind. Your goal is to enjoy the scenery.
26. **Attend free celebrations in your town:** Find local events in the area, such as a Christmas lighting event or a church hosted even. For example, here in Montgomery, Alabama, we have the living Christmas tree celebration that is open to the public and free of charge.
27. **Join a local holiday season choir:** This is a great way to mix and mingle among new people.
28. **Create a house chore list:** This is a great opportunity to declutter your house by ridding yourself of things that no longer serve you.
29. **Plan a throw away party:** This is when you purge your closets, garage, etc. You can donate the clothes, shoes, or purses to a local charity, have a garage sale, or take the items to a consignment shop.
30. **Send Thanksgiving cards:** Give out Thanksgiving cards during the Christmas season to remind people how much they have to be thankful for.
31. **Throw a single girl or guys feast:** Invite all your single friends over and ask them to bring a dish. This is an excellent way single people can come together and celebrate the holidays.

32. **Remember yesteryears are yesteryears:** Do your best to live in the moment. Be optimistic about what is happening in the present moment.
33. **Avoid the perfect gift syndrome:** Do not get caught up in trying to give the perfect gift. The perfect gift you can give those you love, cherish, and care for is your time.
34. **Make a “I will not do list”:** This is a list of things you will not commit to doing to keep yourself happier and healthier during the holiday season. For example, I will not over spend or I will not over commit. Many times in life we have a lot of ‘to do list’ and when we do not accomplish what is on the list, we start to feel sorry for ourselves. However, this is the season to celebrate your “I will not do list”.
35. **Be kind to yourself:** Work on being generous to yourself during this season. Do not spend this season beating yourself up for all things you wish you would have accomplished this year. Spend this time celebrating you. Give yourself the same generosity you give others.

The “holiday blues” is real. There are various reasons one might experience the “holidays blues”. It’s nothing to be a shame of or to hide. Do be willing to accept where you are. Share your emotions with a close friend who really care how you are feeling. Certainly, if this is not working for you, do not hesitate to seek professional counseling. Remember, you will not always feel this way. This is just the season you are in for now. Take a few moments and reflect back on the many suggestions that have been provided in this article. Execute them and put them to work.

Please know you are not alone during the holiday seasons. There are many specialists out there waiting to assist you with getting through the “holiday blues”. Lastly, I would like you to remember to “REST” which is the acronym for:

1. Recognize you are not alone.
2. Establish a workable plan.
3. Say it out loud what you need from others.
4. Talk it out.

Disclosure

This article has not been published elsewhere, nor has it been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere. It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the author.

Suggestive Readings

1. A December Grief: Living with Loss While others are Celebrating by Harold Ivan Smith.
2. The Empty Chair: Handling Grief on Holidays and Special Occasions by Susan J Zonnebelt-Smeenge RN, Ed.D and Robert C. DeVeries D. Min., Ph.D.
3. Healing Your Holiday Grief-: 100 Practical Ideas for Blending Mourning and Celebrating During the Holiday Season by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.
4. How Will I Get Through The Holidays? 12 Ideas for Those Whose Love Has Died by James E Miller
5. Holiday Hope: Remember Love One during Special Times of the Year. By Fairview Press.
6. How to Survive the Holidays: When Someone You Love Has Died by Susan Fuller.
7. Helping the Bereaved Celebrate the Holidays: A Sourcebook for Planning Educational and Remembrance Events by James E Miller.

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