

COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

**DON'T ISOLATE... DON'T ISOLATE... DON'T
ISOLATE
OR
CONNECT... CONNECT... CONNECT**



We've all seen it in the movies... sitting around the fire... all alone... the carolers in the background... a cocktail in one hand... reminiscing about the way things used to be in the "good old days"... and just won't ever be the same again... the melancholy of the holidays...

Romantic? No. Depressing and lonely? Yes. For many people, the holidays become a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures, and anxiety about an uncertain future. This creates a host of reactions often called the "holiday blues," including increased stress, sadness, or anxiety.

To cope with these feelings, acknowledge the losses you feel, but don't oversentimentalize them like in the movies. Most of all, don't isolate yourself.

Connect, connect, connect as in the following ideas:

- 1. Connect with your Spirituality.** Identify the spiritual meaning that the holidays hold for you. The busyness and commercialization of the holidays combined with our sensitivity to the losses we've experienced serve to disconnect us from what these days are really about. Re-connect with religious scriptures or practices, share with others, or engage in personal reflection to experience the gift that our holidays can bring.
- 2. Connect with your Supports.** During times of increased stress, we all need to connect with friends, family, activities, exercise – whatever brings us support. Triathletes consume thousands of calories during the race just to be able to finish. Likewise, we need the emotional sustenance during times that can be especially draining to us.
- 3. Connect with New Rituals.** It will never be like "the good old days" again, but we can find new ways to celebrate and bring meaning to the holidays. If you're separated from family, volunteer for a charitable organization. If you can't be around the family tree, do get one of your own, even if it's a bit smaller. Establish new rituals that will help you stay active in a meaningful way.

"THE HOLIDAY BLUES"

"Every year, I just wish I could get from the day before Thanksgiving to the day after New Year's"

Billy Crystal in "When Harry Met Sally"

The holiday season is a time full of joy, cheer, parties, and family gatherings. Carving the turkey... the carols... the Macy's Parade... the miracle on 34th Street... "It's A Wonderful Life"... Auld Lang Syne. Everyone is having fun... or so it seems.

For many people, the holidays bring on increased stress or sadness. It becomes a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures, and anxiety about an uncertain future. If you get the "holiday blues," you're not alone.

Many factors can cause the "holiday blues": stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial constraints, and the inability to be with one's family and friends. The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests also contribute to feelings of tension. People who do not become depressed may develop other stress responses, such as: any of the following:

SIGNS OF THE HOLIDAY BLUES

PHYSICAL

- ◆ Muscle Tension
- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Change in Appetite
- ◆ Disrupted Sleep
- ◆ Lack of Energy, Fatigue, or Feeling Drained
- ◆ Restlessness
- ◆ Increased Drug or Alcohol Use

MENTAL

- ◆ Dwelling on the Past
- ◆ Ruminating about the Future
- ◆ Wanting to be Alone
- ◆ Impaired Concentration
- ◆ Focusing on Failures

EMOTIONAL

- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Worry
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Lack of Pleasure

SPIRITUAL

- ◆ Feeling Abandoned by God
- ◆ Losing Meaning or Purpose
- ◆ Feeling not even God can help
- ◆ Wanting to distance oneself from Religious Practices

If you experience the above signs, you're not alone. For many people, increased coping efforts and time will help. If you experience a high number of these signs, experience them at a very high intensity, or they last beyond the holiday season, please consult a mental health professional.