

HOLIDAY BLUES

Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year – the Holiday Season. If you listen to the songs and watch the advertising on television you get the sense of total happiness and excitement, anticipation of the best time of the year. How can anyone be “blue” or depressed at this time of year? Aren’t we all supposed to be happy? Actually that is part of the problem – the expectation that everything should be “Merry and Bright” and that all families will behave like the Cleavers and the Waltons. The reality is that this is one of the most stressful times of year for a lot of people. Pressures build around trying to accomplish all the tasks assigned to the holiday season: cards, presents, house decorated, cooking done to perfection, parties, and above all BE HAPPY!! We may be let down year after year if our families are less than TV perfect. Most of us cannot live up to all these expectations and we come through the holidays feeling as if we had somehow personally failed the season or the season had failed us.

The Holiday Blues can hit any of us and it can hit each of us in different degrees. This is why we see an increase in depression, suicide, physical illness, mental illness, irritability, and just plain rudeness this time of year. The stress is overwhelming. How can you escape the Blues? How can you get the most out of this season? Here are a few tips:

1. Keep it simple. Whatever holiday plans you make keep them simple. Try to plan for meals and activities that leave time in between for you to rest and relax. If you have small children, invite the relatives over for a brunch rather than trying to herd the kids to every relative’s home on Christmas day. Write your yearly letter only once and photo copy it, saves time and tedium of re-writing the whole thing 40 times. Use gift cards. I am sure Miss Manners will disagree with me, but, trust me, most people will appreciate the thoughtfulness as they won’t have to hassle with the stores to exchange whatever you got for them. This also saves a boatload of money in shipping costs which can result in decreased credit card bills or in being able to afford more expensive gift cards.

2. Avoid TV Family Syndrome. Few if any of us have family situations comparable to the Cleavers or Waltons, do not expect it. So what if your family has a few wrinkles or glitches, it just makes them more interesting. Do not take it personally!! Either enjoy them for what they are or avoid them if they are totally toxic but do not expect them to change or be different this year. For those with no family in town, toxic families or no family at all, try inviting a few good friends over to share a pot luck dinner and celebrate together. You might want to find a place to volunteer some time, church, shelter, senior center, etc.. We always feel cheered up and much better about ourselves when we are helping others.

3. Holidays alone. If you are making a choice to spend the holidays alone, remind yourself it is your choice. Do not take the victim stance, which leads to self-pity, and whine, “Nobody invited me.” If you want company, who can YOU invite? Many people sit alone because they wait for others to ask; take charge and do the asking and planning yourself. If you are alone because that is your choice, take responsibility for

that choice. Other choices can include: celebrating alone, fixing yourself a wonderful dinner or going out to dinner, you may want to work on a special hobby or project, or do something that is nurturing for yourself. Maybe this is the time to just sit down and read a good book or watch your favorite movies on TV, to rest and relax.

4. Finances. For those of us who have to count our pennies, which is probably most of us, the best advice I have is to make a budget. Figure out just exactly how much money you can afford to spend on gifts and stick within that budget. Do not give in to the advertising guilt-tripping sales pitch. No child ever died because he/she didn't get an X-Box or an iPod for a holiday present. (This will also prevent that typical New Year stressor of trying to figure out how to pay off those credit cards).

Whatever your beliefs and whatever your situation, here is wishing you the very best of the holiday season and for the coming New Year.

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