

MANAGING SEASONAL “BLUES”

*What is it about this time of year that can be so bad for some?
Whatever happened to “’tis the season to be jolly....?”*

Loss issues are intensified

- grief issues flare up
- absence of a loved one, either because of separation or death can be particularly troublesome
- any hole becomes larger – the holidays can be a reminder that you have lost not only the physical person, but also all the connections and traditions associated with him or her as well

Unrealistic expectations (Setting yourself up for disappointment)

- Expectations are high that this season will be/should be/better be magical and perfect...we strive to recapture the wonderment we felt as children waiting for Santa...we wait expectantly for that rush of joyous emotion we're supposed to have as we ponder the religious significance of Christmas and Hanukkah. When those feelings don't automatically well up, we're disappointed
- Spending beyond our means in hopes that this time, it'll all work out financially after the celebrations are over

Seasonal Depression – SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)

- Shorter days, cold, gray weather, can trigger a form of depression known as SAD
- For those who already suffer from depression, symptoms can be magnified during this time of year

Stress Reactions

Even people who do not become depressed can develop other stress reactions during the holidays such as headaches, excessive drinking, overeating and difficulty sleeping.

“Post-Holiday Let-Down”

This feeling of “let-down” can be very normal after the passing of a busy holiday season. This “let-down” can also be the result of emotional disappointments experienced during the preceding months.

So what can we do?

- ❖ Allow time to grieve losses, but also allow time to celebrate the place the loved one had/continues to have in the family's life.
- ❖ Focus on the spiritual dimension of the holidays.
- ❖ Commit to eating healthier and getting enough rest. Holiday foods usually mean a lot of rich, high-calorie, sugar-filled delicacies and opportunities to drink too much. Combine this with a holiday schedule that leaves you overwhelmed is a recipe for feeling tired, unhealthy, overweight and generally depressed. Do not deprive yourself...but do consider moderation and common sense.
- ❖ People who have a good, solid support system, with a good number of emotionally healthy family and friends, tend to enjoy the holidays more.
 - 1) If your support system is lacking, it is recommended to become involved in a cause during the holidays to reach out to others – doing things for the less fortunate is often a good antidote for holiday depression (feeling alone is a common feeling for a depressed person, but can be intensified during the holidays).
 - 2) If you are going to spend time with family members with whom the relationships have been strained, do YOUR best to avoid controversial subjects AND avoid pushing family members' “hot buttons.”
 - 3) Don't use family gatherings or the holidays as the time to correct family problems.
- ❖ Expose self to bright light (especially in the a.m.) for SAD. Outdoor and/or physical activity are also highly recommended whether you struggle with S.A.D. or not.
- ❖ Prior to the holiday festivities, WORK TO DEVELOP A PLAN to confront feelings and keep them from ruining another holiday. When you make your plan be sure to:
 - 1) plan to do things in small doses rather trying to accomplish tasks all at once.
 - 2) PACE YOURSELF! Do not take on more responsibilities than you can handle.

But as you plan, please also remember: ***The holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely; there IS room for these feelings to be present. It IS okay (and very important) to allow oneself to feel these difficult feelings and still have a positive, healthy holiday.***

- ❖ The “let-down” feelings you may experience after your holiday may not be caused by something bad – actually, these feelings may be nothing more than your body relaxing and returning to a pre-stress stage. Your body and mind need time to recuperate after the holiday hubbub, and this feeling of “let-down” can be very normal AND necessary.

For additional information on this and many other mental-health topics:

Mental Health America (www.nmha.org)

Dr. Larry Alan Nadig, Ph.D. (www.drnadig.com/holiday.htm)

American Psychological Association articles (www.apa.org/helpcenter)

Medical Reference for Patients (www.medicinenet.com)