



Unhappy Holidays

The winter holidays aren't the most wonderful time of the year for everyone. For some people this time of year dredges up painful memories from the past. Others are dealing with difficult circumstances right now. Some people struggle with chronic conditions such as depression, anxiety or loneliness that make it hard to enjoy any time of year. Still others feel alienated because the holidays everyone else is celebrating aren't the ones that are meaningful or culturally relevant for them. There are a lot of reasons why people's days might not be merry and bright. All of these reasons, and the feelings they evoke, are legitimate. It's OK to not feel happy during holidays.

Be Realistic! - One of the biggest contributors to unhappy feelings during the winter holidays is our own expectations. Setting realistic expectations can do a lot to ease pressure.

Expectations for Yourself: You're only human. Try to figure out what you can realistically handle, what you may need to let go, and what you will need help to do. It is OK to feel whatever you are feeling. You don't have to pretend to be someone you're not or pretend to feel something you don't feel.

Expectations for Others: Try to approach others with compassion and empathy. It's likely they're having their own struggles, which often show up as irritability, impatience, and criticism. Don't take it personally. Also, don't expect others to undergo a miraculous personality transformation just because it's the holiday season.

Expectations for the Holidays: Don't kid yourself that your house, your meal, your gifts, or your family has to be like something out of a movie. They have teams of writers, set designers and make-up artists working to create the illusion of perfection. Plus the actors get paid to look like they're enjoying themselves and having a wonderful time. Your holiday won't be picture perfect, and that's OK.



Just not feeling it? You're not alone!

Holidays come with a lot of pressure to be cheerful, upbeat and social. Sometimes it is just impossible to live up to this expectation, and yet fears of being called a Scrooge or a Grinch can inhibit speaking up. If this sounds like you, it might help to know that you aren't the only one.

Research from the American Psychological Association found that over 90% of people feel more fatigued than usual during the holiday season and over 80% said their stress level increases. Surveys from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that 66% of people feel lonely at this time of year and 64% of people living with a mental illness thought their condition worsens around the holidays.

What this means is that there's nothing wrong with you if you aren't feeling jolly. In fact, it's actually pretty common.

What to do when holidays aren't happy:

Care for Basic Needs - Get enough sleep, eat healthy food, stay hydrated, exercise, go somewhere you feel safe.

Grounding with Five Senses - When you've been triggered, focus on your senses. What do you see, hear, feel, smell and taste right now? Take some slow, deep breaths.

Set Limits - Limit how much time you spend around people who bring you down. Make a budget for what you can afford to spend and stick to it. Recognize when you've done good enough and when your patience is running thin, then take a break or decide it's time to be done and move on.

Say No - If it's something you don't want to do, you can't afford to do, or you just don't have the time or energy to do give yourself permission to politely decline.

Do What Recharges Your Battery - Does being around others energize you or leave you feeling drained? If it energizes you, make time to socialize. If it drains you, include alone time in your schedule. If there is something else like being in nature, doing something creative, or practicing your religion, that rejuvenates you, make sure to plan time for doing it.

Traditions - Sometimes traditions help us feel connected to pleasurable memories from the past. Sometimes they are painful reminders of past trauma or of loved ones who are no longer around. Sometimes they leave us feeling disappointed as life doesn't measure up to what we want it to be. It is OK to let go of traditions that aren't helpful, to modify them to fit new circumstances or to make new ones altogether.

Avoid Overindulging - Whether it's alcohol, drugs, sweets, or shopping, overindulging to numb or escape from feelings is likely to worsen feelings of depression, anxiety, and guilt.

Sunlight - Lack of sunlight can contribute to depressed moods and irritability. Try to get as much sunlight as possible.

Perspective Shift

It can be easy to focus on what we don't have or what we can't do. Shift to a perspective of gratitude by challenging yourself to identify 3 good things in your life ("I have..."), 3 things you are able to do well ("I can..."), 3 good things about yourself ("I am..."), and something beautiful or enjoyable that you noticed.



Professional Help

Feelings of sadness, worry, and loneliness are part of life - everyone experiences them from time to time. If those feelings seem overwhelming or last for more than a few weeks, it may be a sign that you could benefit from professional help.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, even on holidays.