

Faculty and Employee Assistance Program NEWSLETTER

The Holidays: The Myth of Magical Merriment

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We only have to listen to a few holiday carols or read a few seasonal greeting cards to get the idea of what the holidays are “supposed” to look like, and how they are supposed to make us feel. Advertisements, catalogues, and store windows shout a message about what a “happy holiday” is all about. And, we all bring with us our own ideas and values, memories, and expectations about holidays that also influence how we act, think, and feel during this time of the year.

With all of these messages bombarding us from within and from the outside, it is no wonder many times the holidays fall short of expectations, and leave us feeling exhausted, frustrated, disappointed, and sometimes even depressed. The increased demands on time, money, and emotions can be overwhelming.

Here are some tips for making the most of your holidays and avoiding the “holiday blues”.

- ❖ Realize that the advertisements, television programs about close-knit, happy families, and carols about romance and freedom from troubles are make believe. People are hurt, sick, lonely, grieving, and broke during the holidays just like any other time of the year.
- ❖ Set realistic standards for yourself and others. Watch for perfectionism.
- ❖ Lower your expectations – learn to enjoy the moment for what it is, instead of trying to make it “better”, or worrying about the future.
- ❖ Watch out for the ‘shoulds’, ‘have to’s’, and ‘musts’. Ask yourself “why should I” and “what happens if I don’t?” As, “do I really want to do this, or am I doing it out of guilt, fear, or for some other misguided reason?”
- ❖ Allow for the unexpected – be flexible.
- ❖ Keep your sense of humor.
- ❖ Take time for yourself – to relax, or to do something YOU enjoy.
- ❖ Try to avoid the temptation to overindulge in alcohol, food, or overspending. Doing these things usually has the rebound effect of making us feel more depressed and out of control.
- ❖ If you have recently experienced a major loss in your life, do not try to pretend that everything is just like it

was. Recognize your hurt and pain. Give yourself time to heal.

- ❖ Try to get in touch with the “child” inside yourself. Do not get so caught up in “chores” and responsibilities that you lost the ability to experience joy and fun during the holidays.
- ❖ It is OK to say “NO”. Too many parties, demands, conflicting schedules, etc. just leads to extra stress and pressure. SIMPLIFY!!!
- ❖ Ask for help. Many of us think we have to “do it all” during the holidays to make sure everyone else has a happy

experience. Including family and friends in the planning and doing not only reduces the work load on use, but makes the experience much more meaningful because we connect with others and work towards a common goal.

- ❖ Reach out to others who may be hurting or in need. We get a lot more back from selfless acts of kindness than we get back from elaborate decorations and feasts.

The FEAP is an excellent free and confidential resource.

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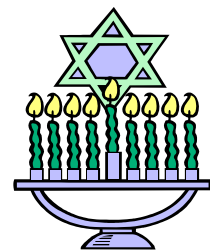
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Thoughts that Cause Problems During the Holidays

1. My house, clothes, looks, kids, presents; spouse, etc. must be perfect.
2. I must “do it all” if the holidays are to be a success.
3. It is terrible when things go wrong.
4. I am loved because of what I do..., buy..., accomplishments..., etc.
5. Everyone is happy during the holidays except me.
6. Everyone else has a ‘normal’ family.
7. Daily problems disappear between November 15th and January 1st.
8. Strong people do not ask for help.
9. It is not okay to talk about your feelings, especially the ‘negative’ ones.
10. I must be invited to all the parties in order to feel worthwhile.
11. If others criticize me, I did something wrong.
12. The world ought to be fair.
13. “Bigger” is “better”.
14. Things should always run smoothly or else, I mismanaged.
15. I should not feel lonely... sad... depressed... angry... during the holidays.
16. I need to eat more or drink more to really feel in the holiday mood.
17. I should be able to please everybody.
18. It has always been done this way; therefore, I have to continue doing it the same way.
19. Holidays are “magic” and I should feel the same way as I did when I was a child.
20. My childhood must always affect me.
21. I am the only one alone during the holidays.
22. I am inferior.
23. I should help everyone who “needs it”, especially this time of year.