

The Holiday Blues

Holiday planning seems to get earlier and earlier every year. Christmas trees, lights and holiday catalogues are up and out shortly after Labor Day. The build-up to the holidays can be a fun and exciting family-filled time, but also, for many, the holidays and the planning for the holidays can be stressful, exhausting and can trigger anxiety, sadness and even depression.

The loss of a loved one, family conflict, lack of finances are situations that can provoke these feelings. The "selling" of the holidays by retail stores can make people feel left out or "less than" if the holidays are not as happy an experience as the one being sold in ads and magazines. There is pressure to live up to expectations and often times, a preconceived idea as to what the holidays should look like and feel like.

So, sometimes, I think it's important to take a break from the holidays. Here are some things you can do to help get you through this time of year.

- It's ok if you don't feel that holiday high. Take a break from the chaos that can accompany holiday preparation. Go at your pace. Turn down invitations. Shopping on Black Friday is not a requirement!
- If you have concerns about too much family time, then make a plan. Shorten a trip. Family tension can run high during holidays. A one-week holiday trip might be better enjoyed as a 4-day trip. If you can afford it and if at all possible, stay in a hotel. This will help you to know that you will have space and quiet at the end of the day.
- Boycott the usual holiday traditions. Do something for yourself. Do a spa day on Christmas. Go for a long walk on Christmas Day to get a break. Have a quiet Christmas Eve at home if a larger celebration is planned for Christmas Day.
- The holidays cost money. This can be extremely stressful for some. Be reasonable about gifts. Make a gift. Bake cookies. Give photographs. Gifts can be simple and inexpensive. If you are really struggling financially, then go easy on yourself, let people know you will not be giving gifts this year.
- Volunteering during the holidays can feel very rewarding.
- The loss of a loved one can make the holidays painful. If the loss is recent, then perhaps this year you do something non-traditional. Trying to stick with tradition while missing a loved one can rub salt in the wound.

And finally, sometimes the holidays can be a very lonely time. This loneliness can trigger hopelessness and thoughts of self-harm, please, if you feel suicidal, reach out. (National Suicide Hotline 800-273-8255).

Enjoy the holidays in your way.

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