

THE FAMILY TREE

PROVIDING SOLUTIONS. PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE.

Coping with the Holiday Blues

In movies, television, and magazines; the holidays are portrayed as a happy, carefree time- filled with family, friendship, and love. However, this is a fantasy for many people, and the holiday season may not always meet up to these great expectations. Holiday planning and celebrations can be associated with many stresses, including increased social interaction, busy work schedules, and the social and personal pressures to spend a great deal of money. There is also a lot of pressure to be an excited, pleasant and gracious host.

However, these pressures may be very difficult to fulfill for some individuals. If you feel socially anxious, it may be hard to host a gathering with many people. If you have a demanding work schedule, it may be next to impossible to have an adequate amount of time to spend with your children. If a family is having financial struggles, the pressure to buy toys, clothes, and candy can lead to heartache. If a parent or family member is struggling with depression, holiday encouragements to be happy and thankful can make an already emotional time of year even more difficult to bear.

The question is; how can we cope with these "holiday blues? Here are some strategies and thoughts to keep in mind.

- 1.) **Be realistic:** Remember, a happy holiday season does not mean that all of one's previous struggles, feelings, and concerns will disappear. Staying positive can help, but give yourself a break if you are unable to always join in the festivities with an energetic attitude.
- 2.) **Give yourself permission to care for your own needs:** Take time out to relax, go to bed early, read a good book, or take a relaxing bath. Your needs are just as important as anyone else's!
- 3.) **Define your limits and stick to them:** There is no need to overextend your time, energy, or bank account! Find a spending limit and stick to it- even if your son wants that brand new video game that just came out. If you are feeling too tired to go to that work gathering, feel free to set your boundaries by saying you will be unable to attend.

- 4.) **Look for Sources of Support:** If you are feeling overwhelmed, talk to a counselor, family member, friend, counselor, or clergy member. Also, there are resources available at The Family Tree, such as Parenting Support Groups and Parenting Classes. You can also call the Family Stress Line, at 1-800-243-7337, for support and resources. The Family Tree's main number is 410-889-2300.
- 5.) **Reevaluate:** The holidays can be a good time to look at your future goals, as well as a time to forgive yourself for past mistakes. Remember, what has happened is in the past, and all we have is the future.

Holiday Stress Reduction Checklist: Some simple things you can do to reduce stress!

-Physical Ways to Reduce Stress

- Get a massage- treat yourself!
- Avoid alcohol and limit caffeine and sugar intake. It may be hard during this time of year, due to parties and other social commitments. But taking the time to care for your health is well worth it!
- Be sure to get adequate sleep

- Creative Ways to Reduce Stress

- Write feelings in a journal.
- Listen to music that either energizes or relaxes you.
- Go to a movie, or take a walk in the park. Change your scenery!

- Emotional Ways to Reduce Stress

- Laugh! Humor is one of the best medicines.
- Don't keep your emotions bottled up! Cry if you need to, or punch a pillow or exercise to release anger.
- Count your blessings, and be grateful for the positive events and people in your life.

-Spiritual Ways to Reduce Stress

- Meditate often, reflect and take time for yourself. It can also be helpful to relax and simply think about nothing!
- Remember to forgive yourself and others- make peace with your past.
- Read a book of personal meaning to you, and reflect upon its meaning in your own life.

-Practical Ways to Reduce Stress

- Delegate holiday chores to other members of the family and/or friend group.
- Stick to a holiday budget, and avoid impulse buys. If you see something you love, wait a day and evaluate whether or not it is something you truly need.
- Start holiday planning early- waiting until the last minute to finish all details can be a large cause of stress.

-Social Ways to Reduce Stress

- Stick with routine, if possible, even during the holidays. This is especially important if you have young children- routine is comfortable and predictable for them.
- If family members make negative comments, shrug them off and remember that it is what you think of yourself that is most important.
- Don't expect people to change. The only thing you can do is change your own reactions. You only have control over how you act! Take the high road whenever you can- you will feel better for it!