

Depression During The Holiday Season

Today's podcast is about depression during the holiday season.

Many people suffer with depression during the holiday season. November & December are very painful for them. Yet sadly, this phenomenon is rarely discussed.

Thanksgiving & Christmas can be a very difficult time for many people & for countless reasons.

Even for those who adore the holidays & circumstances are good in their lives, there is the stress of extra money spent for meals & gifts, so much more to do in preparation such as meal planning & decorating, less time to relax & more. This stress can ultimately result in anxiety & even depression.

For those who don't host, holidays still can be very stressful. There are family demands & expectations. Many dysfunctional families have very high expectations for the holidays & everyone must meet them or else suffer consequences. Having been down this road, I can assure you, it doesn't exactly make a person happy about the holidays!

Often young married couples are pressured to spend holidays with two families, which is very stressful. Their holidays are a source of stress & scheduling to make everyone happy or consequences if they don't.

There are also so many people who have lost a loved one to consider. This may be their first holiday season without the loved one who enjoyed hosting holiday get togethers. No longer having those gatherings can create sadness as losing them is what is known as a secondary loss to the primary loss of that special person. Even years later, that loss still can be painful. Or, even if that person didn't make a fuss over holidays, holidays still may be a reminder that someone special is gone.

Many other people have had to sever ties with their abusive families, & the holidays are a painful reminder that they are without a family. Seeing others happily spending time with their families or talking about how they can't wait to visit with their relatives are painful reminders of what a person in this situation is missing.

People who are unable to be with their family during the holidays experience similar emotions. Law enforcement officers, first responders & military personnel are some examples of people in this situation.

I recently read that an estimated six percent of people struggle with depression during the holiday season. Many of those people don't experience depression at any other time. Some of them also have been misdiagnosed as having Seasonal Affective Disorder because they present with similar symptoms & happen at similar times of the year.

It's also estimated that 64% of people with a mental illness experience worsening of their symptoms around the holidays.

If you too experience depression during the holidays, you aren't alone by far! Many people share your pain. There are some things you can do that can help.

I always recommend starting with prayer. Ask God to help you however you need.

If you feel alone, try spending time with friends whenever possible. Go out for coffee or lunch. Hang out at home & talk. If they aren't available, volunteer with a cause near to your heart or visit folks in nursing homes.

Consider seeing a counselor. If you aren't able to or are uncomfortable doing this, at least write in a journal.

Have good boundaries. Don't say yes to every invitation. You don't need to be constantly busy.

Create new traditions either just for yourself or with your family.

If you feel you must visit others on the actual date of the holiday, set aside a different day to enjoy the day with those closest to you. My paternal grandparents never celebrated Christmas on December 25. They celebrated on the weekend between Christmas & New Year's. That way, no one felt pressured to be with them on Christmas day. They could spend the day however they wanted & still enjoy my grandparents' annual Christmas celebration.

Don't expect your adult children to spend all day with you, especially if they have a significant other or friends they want to visit.

Keep your expectations realistic. Don't expect to lose this depression easily. One good holiday won't cure you forever. It may take several holidays to make progress. Or, you may not be able to shake the depression completely. I haven't been able to. But, since I know it will come each year, I try to find ways to bring some joy into my life during the season.

Don't let anyone shame you for how you feel at this time! I've experienced this & can't tell you how maddening it is. People who are quick to judge lack empathy & have no business hurting someone who is already hurting. Ignore them!

I hope these tips help you! And remember, you're not alone!

Thank you for listening to my podcast!