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Coping With Holiday Blues

For some people, the holidays can trigger feelings of sadness, melancholy, loneliness and depression. The most prominent reason this occurs is due to reminders of painful holidays from the past. Some people have experienced holidays filled with grieving for a lost loved one or a divorced parent, being isolated and lonely, being abused (verbally or physically) by angry siblings, hostile children, drunken relatives, obnoxious parents. The remedy for neutralizing these painful reminders starts with your efforts to make this holiday a positive experience. You can't just sit back and expect yourself to "feel differently." You've got to be on the offensive and take action to ensure a positive, meaningful experience. Here some suggestions:

Spend Time With People Who Care About You

Isolation is your enemy, you need to set up concrete plans with friends, work buddies, etc. If you enjoy being part of a group experience, that's okay, just as long as the group is focused on some positive purpose together (spiritual, recreational, etc.) If there is no one available, find a supportive group for people who feel like you. Being in a group is not going to a movie, play, sporting event by yourself. Feeling alone in a crowd is a common feeling. You need to connect with people you enjoy. When you do this, the companionship of being with others will satisfy you no matter what activity you're engaged in.

Don't Try To Suppress Your Feelings

Before you go out to whatever you have planned, it's wise to spend a minutes reflecting on your wounded feelings. When we repress painful feelings, it gives them more power to influence us in a negative way (like a child afraid of the dark, turning on the light of awareness to expose the lack of threat). By acknowledging those feelings, we hold them up to the light of day and see them for what they are, bygone feelings of the past. Then we feel so much stronger by heading off to do something positive and enjoyable (just doing something positive, makes it enjoyable).

Get Involved

During the weekdays of the holidays (if you're off work) treat yourself to keeping busy with pleasurable things you normally haven't got time for: renting DVD movies, reading a book or magazine that you are (or might be) interested in, visiting a museum or a local destination that you've never had the time to explore. Treat this as a time to reward yourself and spend a few dollars.

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Sources: Holiday Depression & Stress *National Mental Health Association*

(www1.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets) **Tips on Dealing with Holiday Stress and Depression**
Univeristy of Maryland (www.umm.edu/news/releases/holiday-stress)