

Steps to a Joyful Holiday Season

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Holiday blues got you down? Lonely, when everyone else seems to have happy family arms surrounding him or her? Financially strapped? Not quite sure why you hate the holidays, but breathe a sigh of relief when January arrives? Don't despair, try these steps instead.

Blues cures:

- Perform meaningful rituals for departed ones, like placing flowers on their graves, lighting candles or praying. We create much holiday sadness when we focus hours on the past, even if they are happy memories. If you've lost loved ones and miss their presence, ask yourself, would they want you to feel happy or sad? If the answer is happy, limit your remembrance of them to five minutes a day. Write to them, talk to them, look at their pictures during this special time, but then say, "I have honored you, now the rest of the day I will be happier if I don't think of you." If their images comes to mind again, gently pull yourself back to the present moment. You will be amazed how much free time you have to spread joy.
- Spread joy by focusing on others. Volunteer if you have no one to spend the holidays with. Being alone and feeling lonely is a choice. Get active. Pick up your phone and call the hospital, your church, friends or your community center and find out what you can do to help or serve others. When we focus on others we are living in the present and our mood will be lifted.

Financial cures:

- Sit down with all on your gift list and tell them you're feeling too much pressure and it's robbing you of the gift of giving. Hiding your true financial situation from your family or friends can create stress for everyone.
- Set a budget, that all agree to, even children. Five-dollar gifts can bring as much joy as expensive ones. If they don't, are you trying to keep up with the Jones or the TV ads? If your kids throw tantrums or look sad, then this is a great lesson for them. Perhaps they have equated their true worth with their possessions. If their friends abandon them because they don't have a particular thing, what kind of friends do they have? If you feel bad, then perhaps you equate providing, rather than teaching values, as the essential parental role.
- Choose names or draw straws with family and friends. Sometimes we have a tendency to give to others what we'd like to receive or really don't have the foggiest notion of what someone wants, so set a price limit and have the recipient make a list. Imagine having a gift exchange party with receiving only one gift. It can be just as much fun.
- Buy only items on your lists. Credit cards are not free money.
- Have everyone agree to make gifts, write poems, give time or as I mentioned in my last column, coupon books for special services.

General holiday stress cures:

- Limit your activities, rather than trying to be Santa to all, all of the time. This is a great time to test your assertiveness skills and say no if you feel extended.
- Prioritize and ask for help. Martyrs do not have happy holidays.
- Laugh often. Reframe your perceptions. The imperfect dinners or presents make the perfect stories for next year. Nothing in life is really serious; we only make it so.
- Realize you need more rest and lie or sit down for fifteen minutes daily. Set a timer on your stove if you think you might fall asleep. Sometimes our tasks expand to the amount of time we give them.

My next column will be: New Year resolutions...that you'll actually keep!