

Grief, Depression, and the Holidays

While many people look forward to the holiday season, those who are grieving or who are experiencing depression or seasonal affective disorder may struggle. People with these conditions may experience feelings of sadness, loneliness, or dread when the holidays approach.

Common reasons why people may dislike the holidays or experience the “holiday blues” include:

- ▶ Increased stress, obligations, or time pressure
- ▶ Disappointment or unrealistic expectations
- ▶ Grief over loved ones who have passed away
- ▶ Loss of beloved traditions
- ▶ Financial constraints or limited options for travel
- ▶ Estrangement from family or other loved ones

Whether you struggle with the holidays every year or expect that this year will be difficult due to a recent loss, these tips may help:

- ▶ **Manage expectations.** Set realistic goals for what you can accomplish in a given day. If a tradition feels overwhelming, adapt it to what you can handle at this point in time.
- ▶ **Accept feelings.** Acknowledging your emotions is key to dealing with them effectively. There is nothing wrong with feeling sad, stressed, or lonely. Being honest about how you feel will help you determine if you need to alter expectations or change your holiday routine.



- ▶ **Focus on the positive.** It may be difficult to let go of holiday traditions or adjust to spending the holiday without loved ones. While grieving the past is natural, give yourself permission to enjoy the present. Consider adapting traditions to your current circumstances or creating new ones.
- ▶ **Engage in self-care.** Eat right, exercise, and get sufficient sleep. Avoid overindulging in unhealthy holiday foods or excess drinking. Set aside time for activities that help you relax or manage stress.
- ▶ **Reach out.** If you are struggling, talk to a supportive friend or family member. Having a virtual holiday is a good way to spend time with those you love, even if you are far away.

LifeMatters is available 24/7/365, even on holidays. Please reach out if you are struggling.

Source: The National Mental Health Association (NAMI)

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