

## **Jingle Blues: How to Deck the Halls Without Decking Your Mental Health**

The holidays are often painted with a brush of joy, laughter, and togetherness. But for many, this festive season can feel more like a snowstorm of stress, loneliness, and anxiety. If the holidays have you feeling more "bah humbug" than "ho, ho, ho," you're not alone. The "holiday blues" are a real phenomenon, and they can sneak up on anyone—regardless of age or background.

The holiday blues refer to feelings of sadness, anxiety, or depression that occur during the holiday season. These feelings can be triggered by various factors, such as financial stress, family conflicts, or the pressure to meet societal expectations (American Psychological Association, 2009). Symptoms can include irritability, fatigue, changes in sleep patterns, and a general sense of malaise (McLean Hospital, 2023). Left unchecked, these feelings can lead to more severe mental health issues, such as clinical depression or anxiety disorders (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023).

So, how can you manage the holiday blues and make it through the season with your mental health intact? Here are some effective strategies:

### *1. Set Realistic Expectations*

One of the biggest culprits behind the holiday blues is the pressure to create a perfect holiday experience. Remember, no holiday is perfect, and that's okay. Set realistic expectations for yourself and your family. It's perfectly fine if the turkey is a little dry or if the decorations aren't Instagram-worthy. Focus instead on enjoying the moment rather than striving for perfection (American Psychological Association, 2023).

### *2. Budget Wisely*

Financial stress is a common trigger for the holiday blues. The pressure to buy the perfect gift for loved ones can lead to overspending and subsequent anxiety. Create a budget and stick to it. Consider giving meaningful, low-cost gifts, such as a heartfelt letter or a homemade treat. Remember, it's the thought that counts, not the price tag (McLean Hospital, 2023).

### *3. Prioritize Self-Care*

Amid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it's easy to neglect self-care. Make time for activities that help you relax and recharge. Whether it's taking a long bath, reading a good book, or going for a walk, self-care is essential for maintaining your mental health. Don't feel guilty for taking time for yourself; you can't pour from an empty cup (Weir, 2022).

#### *4. Stay Connected*

Loneliness can exacerbate the holiday blues, especially if you're far from loved ones like when on deployment. Make an effort to stay connected with friends and family, even if it's through virtual means. Schedule regular video calls or send thoughtful messages to let them know you're thinking of them. Social connections can provide a much-needed emotional boost (Jha, 2023).

#### *5. Manage Family Dynamics*

Family gatherings can be a source of stress, particularly if there are unresolved conflicts. Set boundaries and manage your expectations. It's okay to excuse yourself from situations that make you uncomfortable. Focus on positive interactions and try to let go of minor annoyances. Remember, you can't control others' behavior, but you can control your reactions (American Psychological Association, 2023).

#### *6. Seek Professional Help*

If your feelings of sadness or anxiety persist, consider seeking professional help. A mental health professional can provide valuable support and coping strategies during these particularly stressful periods. Therapy can offer a safe space to explore your feelings and develop a plan to manage them. There's no shame in seeking help; taking care of your mental health is a sign of strength, not weakness (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023).

In conclusion, the holiday blues are a common but manageable challenge. By setting realistic expectations, budgeting wisely, prioritizing self-care, staying connected, managing family dynamics, and seeking professional help when needed, you can navigate the holiday season with greater ease and joy. Remember, the true spirit of the holidays lies in connection, love, and self-compassion. So, give yourself the gift of mental well-being this holiday season.

### **References**

American Psychological Association. (2009). Holiday blues that linger could be warning sign of depression. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2009/12/holiday-blues>

American Psychological Association. (2023, November 30). Even a joyous holiday season can cause stress for most Americans. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2023/11/holiday-season-stress>

Jha, M. (2023). Resilience strategies can help avert holiday blues. UT Southwestern Medical Center. Retrieved from <https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/newsroom/articles/year-2023/dec-resilience-strategies.html>

McLean Hospital. (2023). McLean's guide to managing mental health around the holidays. Retrieved from <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/mcleans-guide-managing-mental-health-around-holidays>

National Institute of Mental Health. (2023). Seasonal affective disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder>

Weir, R. (2022). Holiday blues: Put your mental health first this holiday season. Huntsman Mental Health Institute. Retrieved from <https://healthcare.utah.edu/healthfeed/2022/12/holiday-blues-put-your-mental-health-first-holiday-season>