



Hope for the Holidays

Holiday celebrations bring us much joy as we gather with family, friends, and coworkers in our homes, schools, and communities. Holidays such as Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and New Year's may be mixed with sadness, joy and new feelings for those of us who have been through the recent natural disasters. Taking care of ourselves during these and other special days such as birthdays and anniversaries will help us get through these times.

Holiday stress can be especially hard on adults, children and seniors who have been through the recent disasters and are grieving the loss of a loved one, of family members who are now far away, or of a home, pets, or personal items. Even positive "stress" such as a new home and new school can add to the stress that comes with the Holidays.

The mixture of sadness and feelings of loss along with celebration are normal when we have experienced disaster. It is OK to enjoy ourselves and find pleasure in our lives again without feeling guilty. We need to recognize it is a normal part of grief and adjustment to think often about the Holiday before it arrives, wondering how it will be to not share the day with a loved one, or be in your own home or with other family members or co-workers to celebrate. These worries and concerns about how the day will be are normal and a part of learning to cope with loss and change. Following are some helpful tips to maintain a healthy state of mind during the holiday season:

For Everyone

- Take time for a favorite activity as a way to relax and relieve stress.
- Talk about your loss, memories of loved ones unable to be with you or of customs that you will be unable to continue.
- Find meaningful activities that honor cultural and family traditions while creating new memories.
- Think about your own needs during the Holidays and "treat" yourself. We can take better care of family and friends if we also take care of ourselves.
- We can relieve the sense of obligation and burden by doing things that we would like to do rather than what we "should" do for a holiday event.
- It is a normal reaction to sometimes feel bitter when others who do not know us wish us holiday happiness when we are trying to cope with losses and sadness through the holiday season.
- Our faith and the faith community can be a great comfort. We can reach out to a spiritual advisor for support.
- Finding even small ways to help others will provide a sense of satisfaction and caring.
- Accept support and assistance. They can help make difficult times more bearable.

- Do not allow yourself to feel guilty that you are unable to afford gifts because of the disaster, instead look for special things that your family can do for each other and provide gift coupons or think of other fun ways to celebrate. Remember that giving our time and talents are the greatest gifts and the most memorable.
- Be realistic in your hope for the holidays and for the future.
- Although it is tempting to do otherwise, get a little extra sleep, eat healthy and exercise to relieve some of the holiday stress.
- The holidays provide time to spend time with others we enjoy and who we can talk to about our feelings and hopes for the future.

Especially for Young People

- Find ways that you can be involved in Holiday celebrations through youth events at church or synagogue.
- Do not feel guilty that you feel happy, sad or apprehensive when other family members may be having the opposite feelings. We may experience different feelings through the holiday season.
- Look for ways to be helpful to your family or in your new community, perhaps by assisting with serving a holiday meal at a church, keeping a young child so a family member or friend can shop, etc.
- Take breaks from the television/DVDs, radio/CDs and video games and interact with family and friends.
- See how many questions you can think to ask your family about their past.
- Avoid the overuse of caffeine, energy drinks, sugar or salty snacks or the use of alcohol or prescription drugs to “get you through.”
- Understand that it is normal to miss your friends and your neighborhood and just wish that things could be the way they used to be. Find ways to remember or contact friends through email, letters, or phone calls if you know where they are.
- Spend time with new friends in your new school. Plan for some special times together during the school holidays.

For Those Involved in Planning Meals and Activities

- Take frequent breaks
- Ask for help (don't assume that it will be offered).
- Avoid the overuse of caffeine, alcoholic beverages or prescription drugs
- Give yourself extra time to get ready for activities
- Get help from family and friends to share the load
- Try to do things ahead of time that will allow you to mix with your family and friends on the day of the event.
- Don't feel that the celebration has to be the way it used to be. Look for new ways to celebrate and a new easy menu.

May You Find Joy and Peace During This Holiday Season!