

HELPING THOSE WHO HURT NAVIGATE THE HOLIDAYS



HOLIDAY BLUES

Why we feel them?

What can we do about them?

How can we help others?





HOLIDAY BLUES: WHY WE FEEL THEM

General Holiday Dynamics that can be Challenging/Stress Producing/Depressing:

- (1) Expectations around mood, look, finances
- (2) Expectations around/Engagement in activities
- (3) Relationships—close and casual, + and -
- (4) Seasonal Affective Disorder
- (5) Weather—lack of engagement
- (6) Social Media Comparison





HOLIDAY BLUES: WHY WE FEEL THEM

Ever-present Dynamic of Grief/Loss:

Types of loss: place (city, home), job/career (retirement, change, reassignment), financial loss, loss of physical or mental ability

Relationships (Death, divorce, estrangement, memory loss, chronic illness, distance, perinatal death, broken friendships, etc.)

Results: Sadness, Fatigue, Depression, Guilt , Regret, Anger (loved one, doctors/company, family, friends, God)



HOLIDAY BLUES: WHY WE FEEL THEM

Prompts for relational grief during the holidays:

- (1) Time for family and friends, thus the absence is more notable, no matter how long it has been—the empty chair.
- (2) Loss since last holiday season, especially if recent. “First holiday without....”
- (3) Anniversary of loss—year, month, day, etc.
- (4) Birthdays, Anniversaries, etc., during holidays.
- (5) Traditions associated with specific people “We always baked cookies with grandma.”
- (6) Holiday/Biblical themes can amplify loss: Perinatal loss/inability to have children, divorce/marital discord, financial struggles





HOLIDAY BLUES: WHY WE FEEL THEM

Prompts for other types of grief during the holidays:

- (1) Financial loss (celebrations, decorations, and gifts)
- (2) Job Loss (Christmas party)
- (3) Moving—loss of home (“We always went to *grandpa’s house*.” “We always went to the Christmas parade in *Richmond*.”)
- (4) Loss of Mental/Physical ability (“We always took a hike on Christmas afternoon.” “We always do a puzzle with Aunt Susan.”)

Impact Scale for Change and Stress Events

(Adapted from Thomas H. Holmes, MD)

Death of a Child	100	Change in Financial Status	38
Death of a Spouse	92	Death of a Close Friend	37
Divorce	73	Change to a Different Line of Work	36
Marital Separation	65	Increase in Spousal Arguing	35
Jail Term	63	Mortgage over \$200,000	31
Death of a Close Family Member	63	Foreclosure/Bankruptcy	30
Personal Injury or Illness	53	Child Leaving Home	29
Marriage	50	Trouble with In-Laws	29
Loss of Job	49	Outstanding Personal Achievement	28
Marital Reconciliation	45	Spouse Begins or Stops Working	27
Retirement	45	Child Secures Driver's License	23
Pregnancy	45	Trouble with Boss	23
Broken Relationship	45	Local Change in Residence	20
Geographical Move	42	Reduction of Family Get-Togethers	15
Sexual Adjustments	39	Loss of a Pet	12
Gain New Family Member	39	Christmas	12
Business Readjustment	39		



HOLIDAY BLUES: WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT THEM

- (1) Acknowledge that the holidays will be different and that dimensions of it will be hard. Give yourself permission to grieve as you need to do so, including crying. At the same time acknowledge that dimensions of the holidays can/will be joyous. Don't miss those moments along the way. You honor your loved one in doing so.
- (2) Be proactive. As best you can, plan for what you want and need ahead of time. Decide where you will want to spend the holidays and with whom. Decide what traditions you want to keep or to change, and what new traditions you might like to start. Plan for the balance of activities with people and time alone that you need. Plan to spend the bulk of social time around those people who help you feel better and less time around those that stress you out. Consider simplifying if needed. Cater meals, eat out, less decorating, presents, cards, activities, etc. Accept the help of others in this task who can be good and respectful guides. Share and discuss this plan with family and friends ahead of time. Be flexible in implementing this plan. Change it if you need to. Have a plan A/plan B, maybe. It's your plan.

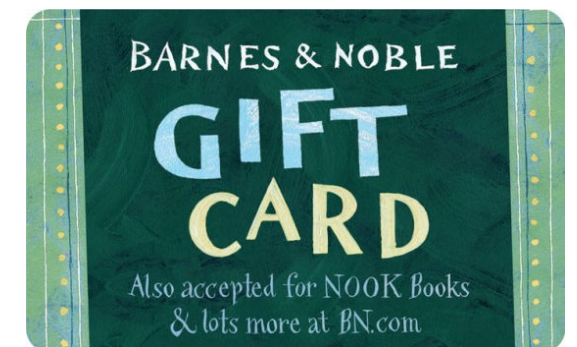




HOLIDAY BLUES: WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT THEM

(3) Be OK with saying, “No.” Even when you say, “Yes,” have an out. Plan A/Plan B for specific events.

(4) Externalize/formalize/honor your grief. Remember your loved one in a special way, special time during the holidays. Memory box/stocking, light a candle, favorite dish/music/tradition, gift special items of loved one to those who would appreciate them, donate money/items/time to a charity of their choice, put out pictures, have a specific story telling time, visit the gravesite together, other creative ideas—gift cards hidden in book stores. Doing such does not limit how or when you may remember your loved one, but having a specific plan as to one time/way you may do such, may allow you and others to more fully engage in the remainder of holiday activities.





HOLIDAY BLUES: WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT THEM

(5) Some counseling articles discuss “skipping” the holidays as one strategy. Other articles suggest that doing so wholesale is not such a good idea.

(6) Give yourself permission to try something new and/or create new traditions. Integrate travel into plans. Celebrate the holidays in a new place.

(7) Ask for help when needed. Say yes to help if offered and needed. Family, friends, counseling, grief groups, Starlight Service—December 18.

(8) Practice good self-care. Watch the food. Watch the alcohol. Sleep/Rest. Exercise. Prayer, meditation, etc.



(9) Remember that not everyone will be grieving the same way you are grieving.



HOLIDAY BLUES: HOW CAN WE HELP OTHERS

- (1) Be sensitive to mood changes in others. Remember recent deaths and other losses of those around you.
- (2) Do not hesitate to express sympathy for the loss, stating the person's name. But also talk to them about other things as well.
- (3) Enquire with them about holiday plans. This may help them begin to make plans. Offer to help them make such plans if such seems overwhelming or confusing to them. As you offer to help with plans or help in other ways, do not impose your own needs/preferences.
- (4) Be alert to signs of depression and broach the topic if such is the case. Be quick to refer to a professional if this is the case.



HOLIDAY BLUES: HOW CAN WE HELP OTHERS

(5) Offer to be a resource person for them throughout the holidays. If they need to talk, talk with them. If they need someone to go with them somewhere, go with them. If they need someone to take them somewhere, take them. Set a regular check-in: a call every Sunday afternoon, lunch every Wednesday, etc.

(6) Do not underestimate the power of tangible gifts.

(7) Pray for them.



(8) Invite them to join you in traditions or events, related or unrelated to the holidays—cut/pick a tree, church services, concerts, games, movies, plays, tacky-light houses, etc. Even errands like going to the grocery store, etc. Be sensitive as to the need here and do not impose or overdo.