



MENTAL ILLNESS: COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is supposed to be a time full of joy, parties and gatherings with friends and families. But the holidays can be a difficult time for many persons dealing with:

- Personal grief
- Loneliness
- Illnesses of all kinds
- Economic concerns
- Separation from family members
- Relationship issues like separation or divorce

While some people experience temporary periods of depression like the “holiday blues” or Seasonal Affective Disorder, many of us live with mental illness everyday.

Here are some tips to get through the holidays!



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Tips for Persons Living with Mental Illness

- Try as much as possible to maintain your routines** like sleeping, eating regular meals, exercising, taking medication, keeping appointments with mental health professionals and attending support groups.
- Prepare yourself by knowing who may be at the holiday gathering.** During this time we may find ourselves at extended family gatherings or at parties with people who do not understand our illness. Large groups can feel overwhelming at any time!
- It is alright to excuse yourself for some time away.** There may be times when you may want to excuse yourself and go to a quiet place.
- For some people its hard to feel down when you're helping someone else.** There are many opportunities to volunteer during the holiday season. The satisfaction of giving to others can help you put your own problems in perspective.
- Live in the now!** Try to let go of past regrets and experiences and find joy in the present moment. And remember, laughter is good medicine!



Tips for Family and Friends

- Include your loved one in holiday activities to the degree that he/she is able to participate.** Setting specific times for family traditions gives the person something to look forward to.
- Prepare those persons who may not know the situation,** if there is to be a large gathering of family and friends. This is a wonderful opportunity to help erase the stigma and shame too often associated with mental illness.
- Set realistic goals and be flexible.** We would all do better to let go of the image of the "perfect" holiday and focus on accepting ourselves and our loved ones without judging, criticizing or advising.

Tips for Communities of Faith

- Sharing familiar stories of faith, singing familiar hymns, and participating in religious rituals can bring comfort.** It can be time to reconnect with faith and spirituality.
- Incorporate mental illness in sermons, prayers, and liturgies** is one step in reminding them that they are not alone.
- Clergy can encourage their congregation to make an intentional outreach to persons outside the faith community.** Bringing small tokens from the faith community can help people feel they are not forgotten.