



Beating Holiday Depression

According to the National Institutes of Health, people experience a high incidence of depression around Christmas. One North American survey reported that 45% of respondents dreaded the festive season.

Some people get depressed at Christmas because of excessive commercialization. Others find that Christmas can be a trigger for excessive self-reflection and rumination about the inadequacies of life (and a "victim" mentality). Other people dread Christmas because of expectations for social gatherings they'd rather not attend. And finally, many people feel very lonely at Christmas, because they have suffered the loss of loved ones or their jobs.

So, what should you do if you're among those who get depressed at Christmas? Mental health professionals who treat people with this problem suggest the following:

- If the depression is serious, seek out the help of a qualified mental health professional.
- Set personal boundaries regarding money spent on gifts and the number of social events.
- Don't accept any "perfect" representation of Christmas that the media, institutions or other people try to make you believe. Lower your expectations and any attachment to what it should look like; be present and enjoy each moment as best you can.
- Become involved in giving in a non-monetary way through charities and worthwhile causes that help less fortunate people.
- Be grateful for what you have rather than focus on what you don't have.
- Avoid excessive rumination about your life.
- If you are religious, take part in church activities that focus on the bigger meaning of Christmas.
- Focus your thoughts on all the good things about Christmas: opportunities to engage in loving kindness, generosity of spirit, and gratitude for others in your life.

The Christmas season has become a difficult time for many people. For those of us who don't have difficulties, it's a chance to reach out to those who become depressed. For those who are depressed, it's an opportunity to take action to think, feel and act in ways that break free from the past.

Credit: Ray Williams in "Psychology Today"