



855-724-9400

## Connelly Law Offices, Ltd. Certified Elder Law Attorney

# Senior Emotions and the Holidays



over 6 million seniors over the age of 65 are clinically depressed and the holiday season exacerbates that condition.

Here are some tips for caregivers and family members:

**Symptoms of depression** – If you know a senior or your parents live alone, be aware of issues like persistent expressions of sadness, crying jags when speaking with you, especially for no apparent reason, inability to sleep or a loss of appetite.

**Let them talk and listen** – Let your loved one or the senior talk. There are many feelings that arise during the holiday season and the best way to help a senior process them is to listen. Encourage them to share memories with you. Most seniors reach a point where their life changes drastically – family members and friends die, some lose spouses. Life becomes about dealing with losses for them.

Allow them to share a photo album with you or listen to music. Don't discourage tears, allow them to feel what they feel.

**Keep in touch** – as the holidays progress, call on a regular basis or make time for them. Not only does it keep up their spirits, but it allows you to see if that you thought may just be the holiday doldrums is actually clinical depression.

Issues like depression are magnified at a time when so many are feeling joyous and happy. It is estimated that

**Don't minimize their feelings** - If the senior appears sad, don't dismiss them by saying, "snap out of it". What you may end up doing is discouraging them from talking about what they are feeling and the consequences could be serious. Encourage them to share with you.

**Encourage grieving** – a senior who has just lost a loved one or perhaps this is the first holiday without a spouse, allow grieving to occur. Seniors who may have received a recent upsetting medical diagnosis may also need time to grieve a change in their lives. Allow it, encourage it, and support it.

Here are some tips for seniors;

**Don't stay home** – go to parties with family and friends. Attend a local senior center and take part in the holiday activities such as tree trimming parties, ornament making and taking trip to see local Christmas lights. Volunteering at a soup kitchen or other social service program can also help.

**Watch the food and drink** – many people try to suppress feelings through over indulgence in eating and drinking. Remember to drink responsibly and do not drink and drive. Also check with your doctor or pharmacist about medications you may be taking and if they interact with alcohol or certain foods.

**Welcome the feelings** – don't be afraid of what you feel. If you are sad, acknowledge it and seek support with family, friend or even professionals.

**If you feel depressed, get help** – if the feelings of being blue seem to persist and include changes in your normal behaviors such as low energy, not wanting to get out of bed, increased drinking or misuse of prescription medication to "take the edge off" and even thoughts of suicide, reach out for help.



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**Stay within your budget** – many seniors feel guilt when they can no longer provide the kind of gifting due to a limited budget. Make a budget and stick to it.

Here's what caregivers and seniors can do together:

**Bake some cookies** – wrap them and give as gifts to family and to neighbors. Stopping by at other senior's homes can help them stave off the holiday blues as well.

**Shopping** – even window shopping. Nothing is more exciting than being in a crowd and just walking around. You meet people and may even make some friends without spending a cent.

**Caroling** – many senior centers do Christmas caroling. Join a senior center and meet new friends, not just for the holidays but year around.

**Christmas lighting ceremonies** – check the local papers or if you are computer literate, see what localities are doing tree lightings. These usually come with free refreshments and entertainment and is a good night out.

**Check on other senior friends** - Chances are that if you are feeling it, so are others. There is support in numbers.

**Treat yourself** - Give yourself a new haircut or have your nails done. For a special indulgence, get a message. It feels good but also helps relieve anxiety and stress.

One other issue that can arise around the holidays is the first Thanksgiving or Christmas without a loved one being present. I remember speaking with a widow who struggled with the first holiday without her husband.

She told me her family tried to make her feel at home by not discussing the loss of her husband. What she decided to do was honor him by doing those things he really enjoyed at the holiday. She bought a gift for him, made his favorite dish and shared stories about him with family and friends.

“This helped me tremendously and I never did it again, but it sure got me through the first Christmas without him. It helped me remember him but also prepared me to make new memories with my family and friends. He would have wanted it this way”.

Holidays are stressful times for all of us but can be especially taxing for seniors. Encourage them to stay active through some of the suggestions above or ideas you may have for them. What you are aiming for is allowing them to feel a sense of belonging and the knowledge that they can still contribute to their family and friends.



*Attorney Connelly practices in the area of elder law. This area of law involves Medicaid planning and asset protection advice for those individuals entering nursing homes, planning for the possibility of disability through the use of powers of attorney for the both health care and finances, guardianship, estate planning, probate and estate administration, preparation of wills, living trusts and special or supplemental needs trusts. He represents clients primarily in the states of Rhode Island, Connecticut and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He was certified as an Elder Law Attorney (CELA) by the National Elder Law Foundation (NELF) in 2008. Attorney Connelly is licensed to practice before the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Federal Bars.*