



Expectations, What are They Good for?

We all have varying expectations about ourselves, others, and the world. We may expect others to be kind, on time, or love us like we want to be loved. We may expect ourselves to be sober, successful, or never relapse. We may expect the world to be fair, easy, or give us what we want. However, at times our expectations aren't realistic and harm us instead of helping us. **Sometimes expectations are pre-meditated resentments.** For instance, if my sister is historically late to events and I expect her to be on time then I am setting myself up to be disappointed and mad. Another example, if I expect myself to bring the family together for a perfect holiday then I am setting myself up for frustration and shame for not being good enough. In general and especially around the holidays it is important to examine your expectations and ask, "Is this realistic or helpful? Does this expectation make me happy or set me up for resentment and failure? What is the need underlying my expectation?" If the expectation reveals a boundary that helps keep you safe such as, "I expect you not to use substances in my home." then **ask for what you need to be safe and healthy this season.** Your needs are important and deserving. You are responsible for your own happiness and we at High Point are here to help you examine your expectations so that you have more success. Remember this process of increasing your happiness and peace of mind takes time and attention. Be gentle with yourself, you're an amazing, beautiful creation and there is love and support available at your fingertips.

Emily Hand, MA, NCC

Tips to Help Deal with the Holiday Blues

1. Be honest—tell people what you DO and DON'T want to do for the holidays
2. Be healthy—eating right, getting lots of rest, taking vitamins, and exercising can all help alleviate stress
3. Take advantage of the sunlight hours—natural light can help elevate your mood so spend some time whenever possible outside or in a sunny spot
4. Put out a "memory box" or "memory stocking" where you and others can write down and put memories you cherish. Get them out and read them together
5. Light a candle in your home in memory of missing loved ones
6. Journal whenever you are having a hard time
7. Be social and be sure to spend time with other people making new memories
8. Say NO to some holiday events so you don't suffer holiday overload—it's okay to put yourself first once and awhile
9. Warmth improves mood so if you're feeling sad or lonely, treat yourself to a warm bath or a hot cup of tea or cocoa
10. Spend time alone to reflect and grieve, if necessary—let yourself feel

The Sharing Branches

During the month of December you will have an opportunity to help decorate the Sharing Branches for Christmas. As you meet with Jessica, you can choose to put a gift under the tree and/or hang an ornament on the tree. You will put either a Christmas wish, tradition, or memory on the gift—so be thinking about that. The ornaments are going to be in memory of loved ones who are no longer with us. You can use the supplies provided to decorate your ornament and we'll put your loved one(s) name on them before hanging them on the tree.



Did You Know...?

- The first known candy cane was made in 1670 by a German choirmaster to help children endure lengthy nativity services. The candy cane made its way to America in 1847, when a German immigrant decorated the tree in his Ohio home with the iconic candy.
- One of the popular Christmas games in the 1600's was "Snapdragon." Everyone would gather round a table, and a large dish scattered with raisins was placed in the middle. Whiskey or Brandy was poured over the raisins and the plate was set afire. Players would reach in and pluck a raisin from the flaming dish and quickly swallow it. I have no idea how the winner of this game was decided. Maybe the person with the most skin left on their fingers.
- A popular Christmas tradition in Japan is Strawberry Cake. Topped with mounds of whipped cream and ruby red strawberries, this cake came into vogue in the years after World War II when sugar was scarce and American baked goods were synonymous with wealth and plenty. It became so popular in fact, that there is a specific Japanese Christmas Strawberry Cake emoji on your phone.



UGH!! The Holidays

City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style...children laughing, people passing, meeting smile after smile...our culture, our traditions, and our peers all put pressure on us to be busy, happy, and excited about the holiday season. However, let's face it, some of us feel a lot more like Ebenezer Scrooge and want to say, "Bah! Humbug!" Maybe we feel more like the Grinch and want to steal Christmas away so that we don't have to see, hear, smell, or face any part of it. It's perfectly normal to be in the middle of the holiday season and realize that you really hate it all. In spite of what everything we see and hear is trying to tell us, the holidays can be an especially difficult time. Many of us struggle with depression, loneliness, stress, anxiety, grief, and loss. Just because there's a fat man running around in a red suit doesn't mean that those issues go away. In fact, the way our world celebrates Christmas can often exacerbate those feelings, intensifying them instead of making them go away. Many of us spend time dreading these days. If you are one of the many people who don't feel the holiday spirit, how can you deal with this in a healthy way? Is it possible to experience the season differently?

The first and most important thing is to face the facts. Admit that you're more on the Grinch side of the scale but also remind yourself that there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. You are perfectly normal, thank you very much. If you struggle with depression, please know this is very real!! Many people experience depression through the holidays for multiple reasons. The days are shorter and darker which can bring on seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Do you feel stress or anxiety? Do you have unrealistic expectations or financial struggles? Are you unable to be with loved ones? Have you just (or are you in the middle of) a change in lifestyle? All those things can create or deepen already existing depression. Now that you have acknowledged this fact, what can you do about it so that you can make it through the holidays? Some things that will help are having realistic goals and expectations, taking time to rest (don't overdo it), not isolating yourself, spend time in the sun (take a walk, sit in a sunny spot for 20 minutes), learn and practice forgiveness and acceptance for the actions of yourself and of others, take some "me" time and do something you enjoy or that makes you happy (it's okay to be selfish once and awhile), avoid social media (take a break from Facebook), volunteer or help another person in need, set a budget (talk to Jess if you need help with this). It's okay to feel sad or depressed and instead of stressing over it or wasting energy to avoid it—embrace it and move through it.

Maybe you struggle with loneliness. Every person alive has felt lonely. It's even common to feel most lonely when people are around. You are not alone in this! When you are feeling lonely take a moment and do something for yourself to increase your self-esteem and to feel better, connect with other healthy people by starting a conversation or making a phone call, step out and help others, cultivate an attitude of gratitude (see the Nov newsletter) and focus on what you have in your life. Most importantly remember you just need to get through one day at a time, tomorrow it will be over. You can also set extra time to come in and talk with your therapist, they will be happy to help you focus and work through your holiday loneliness.

Stress and anxiety are the great thieves of life. They sneak in and steal all the time we have that could be used to make good memories. If you struggle with stress and anxiety, plan ahead on how you can deal with situations, shopping, cooking, family time, whatever the situations are that bring your stress and anxiety to the front. Looking ahead and making plans to make things easier can help a lot! It also helps if you work to leave the past in the past and let the future be in the future. Focus on today and be present in the "now" as much as you can. Enjoy the moment! Focus less on details and more on the big picture. Take time for you again!!

Maybe the holidays are full of grief because you have a loved one who is no longer with you. You might be grieving over the loss of a loved one because of a death but grief is just as strong over a relationship that has been broken or lost. You can also suffer grief over changing your lifestyle, location, social network, job, relationship, or getting older. The first step is to understand that grief is a normal part of healing and everyone goes through it differently and in different time frames. Allow yourself to feel the emotions that come (sadness, loss, missing someone). The holidays often bring grief to the forefront. Start a new holiday tradition in memory of the missing loved one(s), or do an activity that you and your loved one did together in memory of them. Acknowledge your loss, think about the good times you have had and make a good memory into a living celebration for the holiday season.

In addition to all these things, let's not forget about the addiction piece. It is important to plan ahead so you can be more prepared for triggers and/or relapse. Do some relapse prevention planning. If you feel you may be exposed to substances, plan for this by having a healthy support person with you to help you avoid using. Consciously avoid those people or places that you know will expose you to temptation. Wherever you plan to be take time to think through an escape plan, and use coping strategies that work for you. When we get stressed or deal with difficult emotional situations we naturally resort to our automatic way of operating, old behaviors, or negative coping strategies. Let's face it, it's much easier in the moment to give in rather than to employ the positive coping strategies that you have been learning. STOP and THINK. Having a plan ready increases your chances for success. You can do it!! Remember everyone here at HPC is cheering for you!

If you are interested in additional information or help with the topics that have been discussed, then talk with your therapist. Let us know what you need or are struggling with today. We are here to help you. This year can be different. Remember, YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Depression is caused by dwelling in the past. Anxiety is caused by worrying about the future. Peace is accessed in the present moment.

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