

## **“Singing the Blues”... What are the Holiday Blues?**

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### ***What are the holiday blues; common reactions to holiday blues; what causes holiday blues; coping skills for the blues...***

For some of us the holidays are a time of celebration, cheer, and enjoyment... for others the holidays are a time of regret, despair, and sadness... holiday blues. Holiday blues can affect both men and women, young and old.

The holiday blues are feelings of sadness, stress, irritability that tend to occur around holiday season. Sometimes the “blues” have been present for some time, but with added demands of shopping, parties, family gatherings, finals/school projects, unrealistic expectations, too much commercialization, and the inability to be with one’s family may exacerbate feeling sad.

#### *Reasons for holiday blues include:*

1. Unrealistic expectations
2. Reaching for perfection-a picture perfect holiday celebration
3. Wanting to replicate past holiday celebrations
4. Busy schedule studying, shopping, wrapping, cooking, cleaning can lead to fatigue
5. Memories of deceased loved ones
6. Family togetherness- can be a good thing, or it can be a stressful thing
7. Past holidays may have been difficult; our lives may not be as full as we would like
8. There may be feelings of loneliness, sadness. Or anger
9. For some, the holiday season presents as a time for self-evaluation which may reflect on past failures, an uncertain future, feelings of loneliness, and tension

Common reactions during the holidays include headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating or not eating enough, difficulty sleeping, feeling lonely, sad, crying spells, anxiety, and irritability.

*How is holiday blues different from clinical depression? Clinical depression is a persistent state of depression, hopelessness, and helplessness not necessarily related to the holiday time or to the situation.*

*So, how does one cope with the holiday blues?* College, work, relationships, added demands of holiday season and life in general can effect mood or exacerbate depressive symptoms. The following are suggestions to help manage demands, keep things in perspective, and get through the holidays.

1. *Don’t overload yourself*- It is close to impossible to celebrate every major holiday with every loved one on your list. It is important to attend holiday parties and gatherings, but it is more important to take care of you... perhaps start new holiday traditions.
2. *Prepare your emotional self*- If you must spend time with relatives or friends with whom there may be conflict, decide in advance how you’re going to handle the situation. Plan how you will respond to unwanted comments rather than becoming engaged in a bad situation.
3. *Don’t feel pressure to be in the holiday spirit*- If you have been through a traumatic experience, break-up, or loss, accept your experience. Don’t force yourself to feel festive because others are festive; be honest with others and yourself.
4. *Don’t consume too much alcohol*- Celebrating can be fun and drinking can get out of hand in the spirit of ‘celebrating’. Remember~ alcohol may add to your feelings of depression or anxiety.

5. Don't spend too much money- Money is tight for most college students. It's easy to get sucked up into the whole gift buying for everyone, but special gifts don't have to be expensive~ pictures are great ways to show loved ones they're special.
6. Sun seek- exposure to sunlight at least 20 minutes during winter weather can improve mood.
7. Exercise- Try to maintain exercise as part of your day. Exercise helps keep blues away.
8. Take a break- Take time for yourself; remove yourself from some of the festivities if they are making you nervous, worried, or stressed.
9. Don't compare yourself to others- When you start comparing what you don't have, what you wished you had, feeling of sadness, hurt, anger, or loneliness can be exacerbated. Be grateful for what you do have.
10. Let go of the past- Don't dwell on the past and what it used to be. It can help in creating feelings of disappointment if your holidays aren't like they used to be. Look to the future to set new traditions.

*Helping others cope with holiday blues:*

1. Try to involve that person in holiday activities, but don't be forceful.
2. Be a good listener. Let them know you are there for them and are willing to help them seek professional help.
3. Familiarize yourself with resources such as the mental health centers, counseling centers, and hotlines.
4. Be aware that holidays can be difficult for people, especially when reality doesn't measure up to expectations. Help them establish what is realistic and what is not.

Campus resources:

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*Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor; National Certified Counselor*

**VCSU Counseling Services Office**

**McFarland 424**

**701.845-7424**

**Monday – Friday 8:30 -4:00 pm**

Sources:

CareNotes; One Caring Place; Abbey Press. 2004 *Comforting Thoughts When Life Feels Lonely*.

CareNotes; One Caring Place; Abbey Press. 1996 *Getting Through the Holidays*.

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