



MONTHLY MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Presented by the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office Mental Health Task Force

In This Issue: Mental Health and the Holidays



Mental Health And The Holidays (*two things that do NOT always coincide*)

For many people the holidays will be a time of togetherness, and happiness. For many children and adults, the holidays are their favorite time of year. However, for others this season brings a dreaded expectation to be happy and if they aren't, they may feel left out and alone. It really would be wonderful if the holiday traditions could automatically bring about a happy mood and joyful emotions in all of us. Unfortunately, the reality for many is that the holidays are a time of negative ruminations and stress.

The Mental Health Task Force ask that you keep in mind the helpful information below in the hopes that everyone may have a time of joy and good mental health throughout this and every holiday season.

BEST WISHES AND PEACE FROM THE GCSO MHTF!

Signs that the holidays may be emotionally or mentally challenging for you:

- Changes in eating patterns, (*eating more or less than usual*)
- Changes in sleep patterns (*unable to fall asleep, unable to stay asleep or sleeping too much*)
- Depressed or irritable mood
- Difficulty focusing on tasks at hand
- Feelings of guilt and/or loss of self-worth
- Feelings of overall fatigue
- Feeling tense, worried, or anxious
- Wanting to avoid engagement with others
- Having a history of feeling relief when the holidays are over
- Feeling like you are faking joy and happiness just to fit in with others during the holidays
- Finding yourself ruminating about past negative events in your life more than usual

Why Does This Happen To So Many People?

In our society the holidays may bring on a sense of added stress on several levels. These levels include, finances, social and familial demands and expectations. Unfulfilled expectations of love and happiness during the holiday season can also be a trigger for negative mood, emotions, memories of past trauma, and even mental illness. Many persons suffering from mood disorders, trauma, negative emotions, and stress feel the symptoms of those ailments worsen during the holidays. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) 64% of persons with a diagnosis of mental illness report that their symptoms get worse during the holidays. However, it is not just people suffering with mental illness that experience negative moods and stress during the holidays. It is estimated that up to 60% of the population experiences high levels of stress and negative emotions throughout the holiday season (UC Davis 2022).

So if you have been experiencing any of these uneasy feelings during the holidays and feel drained trying to put on a smile and imitate the expected feelings for the sake of others, don't feel alone. You are one of millions of people that endure these emotions every year.

Tips For Protecting Our Mental Health During The Holidays?

Acknowledge your feelings; Putting on a happy face when you do not feel happy may be done out of politeness or the need to fit in. It is important to identify your authentic feelings. Fitting in at the expense of your authentic self may make your negative feelings get worse. You are entitled to your authentic feelings even during the holidays. Accept them and remember that you are just as entitled to your feelings as those around you are entitled to theirs. Allow yourself some Grace.

Identify what you want the holidays to look like before they arrive. (*Stress may grow from feeling obligated to participate in ways you do not want*); Emotional self-awareness helps you set boundaries with holiday social demands. Set these boundaries early on. Making those decisions early will be less stressful than the dread of attending events or trying to get out of going the day of the event. People will understand, especially when they know long before the date of the event.

Managing your time starts before the holidays arrive; Along with setting those boundaries with others, comes the healthy management of your time. This includes how much time you will spend cooking, baking, or shopping for gifts. Think of it as setting a boundary with yourself.

Do something healthy for you; Do not allow the holidays to get in the way of your healthy habits such as exercise and enjoying nature. You may want to step those activities during the holidays. Engage in positive life activities.

You cannot be all things to all people; Your health must come first. Those who love you and care about you will understand. They will want you to be healthy, but you may need to be honest with them about the negative feelings the holidays may bring you.

REFERENCES

The G.C.S.O. Mental Health Task Force encourages you to utilize the sources listed below and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) at www.samhsa.gov](#) to learn more about this and other important mental health topics.

<https://namica.org/blog/handling-stress-during-the-holiday-season/>

<https://health.ucdavis.edu/news/headlines/7-tips-for-managing-your-mental-health-during-the-holidays/2022/12>

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