



Milwaukee School of Engineering Counseling Services Newsletter

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Holiday Blues

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What You Can Do to Enjoy the Holiday Season

It's mid December and you've got a test tomorrow, but somehow you find yourself fighting for a parking space at the mall. As you are cut off by a third SUV in a row, you can't help but wonder why you even bother. You don't have the money to spend on gifts, or even the time to shop. The thought of spending several days with bad eggnog and your crazy relatives is already giving you a headache. Worst of all, you know that if you don't pretend to be enjoying yourself for the whole break your mom is going to get mad and accuse you of "not being in the holiday spirit." Why can't the holidays be happy, like they were when you were growing up?

If you can relate, take heart! You're not alone. The holiday blues is a loose term that is meant to describe a general lowering in mood that often occurs around the month of December. While some people experience only mild sadness, others can become severely depressed. There are a number of reasons that this time of year makes people sad.

*Many people feel that they must participate in holiday activities such as shopping or decorating, which are piled on top of already busy schedules. This causes more stress.

*Spending more money on gifts can make the holidays a time of financial stress. Additionally, companies tend to make layoffs in late fall to ensure a profit in the last financial quarter, causing money worries for those who have lost their jobs.

*For some, the over-commercialization of holidays that hold special religious or personal significance can be demoralizing.

*Only about 25% of all individuals are living within what would be considered a traditional family at the present time. Death, separation, divorce, remarriage, and job-related separations cause many individuals to feel a dissonance with the traditional holiday-related values.

*The Thanksgiving-to-New Year's holiday season occurs during the time of year when there are the fewest number of hours of daylight. Research has shown that ten to twenty percent of our population is significantly affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Regardless of other

factors related to the holidays, sufferers of true Seasonal Affective Disorder may experience chronic fatigue, difficulty in sleeping, irritability, and feelings of sadness. Research shows that SAD responds to short periods of light treatment.

What to do if you're feeling down during the holidays

Here are some suggestions from the National Mental Health Association

***Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable.** Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not put entire focus on just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day) remember it is a season of holiday sentiment and activities can be spread out (time-wise) to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.

***Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely.** There is room for these feelings to be present, even if a person chooses not to express them.

***Leave "yesteryear" in the past** and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don't set yourself up in comparing today with the "good ol' days."

***Do something for someone else.** Try volunteering some time to help others.

***Enjoy activities that are free,** such as driving around to look at holiday decorations; going window shopping without buying; making a snowperson with children.

***Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.**

***Try something new.** Celebrate the holidays in a new way.

***Spend time with supportive and caring people.** Reach out and make new friends or contact someone you have not heard from for awhile.

***Save time for yourself!** Recharge your batteries! Let others share responsibility of activities.

MORE RESOURCES ON THE HOLIDAY BLUES

MSOE has a sunlamp that can help counteract the effects of Seasonal Affective Disorder. It's FREE for MSOE students, faculty and staff to use! Simply schedule an appointment with Health Services at x7590.

Confidential Mental Health Screening, including screening for depression, is available at the MSOE counseling website. Just go to : http://www.msoe.edu/st_life/couns/ Then click the Screening for Mental Health - Online Screening Program link.

RELATED LINKS

The American Psychological Association has a help center about topics, including holiday blues. <http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/>

The National Mental Health Association Webpage on Holiday Blues: <http://www.nmha.org/infoctr/factsheets/103.cfm>

The University of Maryland Medicine Website has Dos and Don'ts for the Holiday Blues: <http://www.umm.edu/mentalhealth/holiday.htm>

SafeUSA's prevention page: <http://safeusa.org/blues.htm>

University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire's counseling website: <http://www.uwec.edu/counsel/pubs/holidaydepr.htm>

Don't forget MSOE's Counseling Services! Counseling Services provides a setting in which students may discuss in confidence with a counselor any problems that affect them. The counselor can help students focus on realistic solutions to these and other potential problem areas.

MSOE Counseling Services is located on the Second Floor of the Kern Center (K-230). To Schedule an appointment with a Counselor, call (414) 277-7590. For more information, visit Counseling Services at: www.msoe.edu/st_life/couns