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Frozen Feelings ©

For many people, the Holiday season is a time for excitement and happiness. This is when families are “supposed” to join together and enjoy the warmth and comfort of being surrounded with love. However, for many people, this “family love” is not so warm and comfy.

There are other people who look at the Holidays as a stressed-filled time full of disappointment, anxiety, and sadness. But why? If we are typically encircled by family and friends during this festive time of year, why would some people feel depressed? Oh, the reasons are endless.

What Exactly is Depression?

Let's start out with the basics. We all become sad sometimes. We all have bad days. However, if you find yourself crying constantly, unable to climb out of bed in the morning, and thinking unpleasant thoughts of suicide for more than two weeks, you may have depression—along with millions of others.

1.) Dreams Vs. Reality

When some folks think of the Holidays, they tend to glorify them. They envision a large family crowding around a beautiful, well-lit Christmas tree, singing melodic carols and taking long, lazy sips of spiked eggnog. Close by, a warm fire crackles and falling snow can be seen through the bay window. This is their dream—the trademark Christmas.

So, when their dysfunctional family of four shows up with nary a present in tow, refuses to sing carols because one light on your Christmas tree burnt out, and now the entire tree is dim, and the spiked eggnog is saved for another day because Uncle Bob is an alcoholic—they become disillusioned by the whole affair. Also, the fact that your sister has given you the silent treatment every year because you stole her seventh-grade boyfriend doesn't help, either. Ah, reality.

Coping Method: Realize that your family is not perfect. Try to set realistic goals for yourself when they visit. For example, do not expect to talk into the wee hours of the night with the sister who you are not close with. Instead, plan to be courteous, and welcome her into your home. Then, just be yourself. If a conversation ensues, wonderful! If it does not, do not feel saddened. Holidays do not automatically mean that you will renew lost relationships. Just try to leave those old feelings of bitterness behind you, and see what this season brings.

2). One Is the Loneliest Number...

If our family is “crazy” we want to be alone, but when we are alone, we just want a “crazy” family. Being alone during the Holidays causes depression in

many people. Without loved ones to help decorate the tree or light the Menorah, many people feel lonely and sad. They see all of the sappy Christmas specials on TV that show how wonderful the Holidays can be when shared with others, but they have no one to share their Holidays with. Just because it is "the time to be merry," it does not expel the loneliness.

Coping Method: If you are alone this Holiday season, you do not have to be. Volunteer at a local homeless shelter, or spend Christmas Eve answering Help Lines. Do something for someone else to take your mind off of yourself. Spend the Holidays with other caring individuals, and you will not feel so alone.

3). Financial Constraints

Your financial situation can cause stress and worry, and possible depression. Saving money during the Holidays is like breathing underwater—impossible. Between traveling, gifts, food, and entertainment, the Holidays can cost you a fortune. And many times, people do not have a fortune to spend. Making sure that everyone on your shopping list receives "the perfect" gift, while keeping your budget, drives many people to drink—and not just eggnog. And then, when the season is all said and done, people are left with huge credit card bills and even more stress than they had before.

Coping Method: Remember, your true friends do not care what you buy them. They are most likely thinking about what to give you! So, stick to a price limit, and keep that limit low. For example, have your circle of friends only buy gifts for under \$10.00 each. Or, if you have a lot of mutual friends, hold a gift exchange event. Pick names out of a hat and only buy a gift for the one person you pick. This way, you and all of your friends will receive a special, yet inexpensive gift without the anxiety. Keep in mind that homemade gifts, fresh-baked cookies, and cheap gag gifts make wonderful presents, too.

4). It's Not My Family, I Swear!

"No, no, no..." you are thinking, "My family is wonderful. We are close and actually enjoy each others' company." So, then why are you depressed every Holiday season? Well, did you know that your environment can be a factor that causes the Holiday Blues?

As the Holiday months roll around, so does the Earth. In most areas of the United States the days become shorter in the winter, meaning the sun sets in the early evening. This untimely darkness has a negative effect on many people. They suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, a mood disorder appropriately acronym-ed SAD.

Coping Method: Speak with your doctor or a mental health professional. Perhaps he or she can recommend a treatment for your wintertime depression. You do not have to spend the Holidays in a frozen funk.

So, do you see what we mean? Depression hits when people are saddened by stresses in their lives. And, for many people, the relationships they keep with their family members and financial difficulties can cause conflict at any time, not just during the Holidays. The reality is, not all families get along. Not everyone has family. And, not everyone has tons of money to spend. Once people realize that not all Holidays are magical like a Hallmark card, then perhaps their expectations can be minimized, thus leaving them to relax and actually enjoy their time off from work.