

## **Families - Coping With the Holidays**

*By Mike Witzky*

Holidays are often a time of rushing around doing last minute shopping, cooking cleaning and parties. Stress levels for everyone increase during this time. Most of us are able to take this in stride, mix these activities and wind up enjoying ourselves. For some, the Holidays are events that create a great deal of stress and increase feelings of depression and anxiety. This article will look at these issues and offer some suggestions that may help.

Stress can come from several areas. Our expectations can often be too high. We can sometimes give into the pressure to have the latest DVD player or the newest Plasma TV. We are bombarded with advertising that encourages us to part with as much of our hard earned money that they can pry from our wallets. As parents, we can also buy into the notion that we need to buy lots of presents. While this may not be completely a bad notion, the Holiday season does not have to be about presents, but about creating good memories. Take a step back and talk to the family about traditions. Make the Holidays a time to remember not avoid.

Some may have experienced a loss from death or divorce that can make this season more difficult. If you have lost someone through death, it may be unrealistic not to feel sad. My suggestion is not to let this grief become overwhelming. Take time to remember, even if this time brings sadness, but don't stay in this place too long. For families that have experienced divorce, realize that this will create its own difficulties. Don't try to pretend that everything is going to be just like it always was. Don't use the holiday as a tool to work out your own feelings of anger or resentment. Children will already feel the stress; try not to compound it with other issues. Again, it is a time to think about making new holiday traditions with the children.

Some people experience seasonal depression that has been associated with the lack of sunlight. This is called Seasonal Affective Disorder. This can make the holiday season even more difficult. If anyone sees that his or her mood changes during the winter months, it may be an indication of this. Exposure to sunlight is the best way to treat this condition. Try to get natural sunlight for at least a half hour each day (but don't look directly into the sun). This should not be through sunglasses and this works even on overcast days.

Finally, there is the post holiday blues that can creep up on you. The letdown after the holidays can bring some depression too. If you anticipate this then you can try to plan to do some simple things that can help. Look at getting together with friends, take some time for just yourself and don't spend time thinking how the holidays could have been better. Holidays can be a joyful time but can also be very difficult for some. The important thing to remember is that they do come to an end and you can begin to get your life back to normal.

If you think a family member may benefit from professional assistance, please go to the "Find a Service Provider" section of the BHG Web site <http://www.bhg.org> to locate a behavioral healthcare agency in your county.

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