

Surviving the Holidays - Practical Tips

For those experiencing a loss, October through December can be excruciatingly painful months. Death, separation, divorce, illness, family trauma, job loss or moving to a new location result in great losses that make the holidays difficult.

PREPARE — The ambush of emotions can attack at any time; prepare beforehand.

ACCEPT the difficulty of this time of year and your loss. Remember that it's a season and it will pass.

SOCIALIZE — Don't hibernate. Insecure feelings may tempt you to isolate but force yourself to go out even if it's only for a short time.

LOWER your expectations — Movies and songs paint an unrealistic picture of the holidays.

DON'T ANESTHETIZE the pain with drugs or alcohol — Numbing emotional distress with chemicals creates more depression.

TRIMMING — If old ornaments or trimmings cause too much pain, don't hang them this year. Put them aside for another time.

GET UP AND MOVE — Take care of your physical well-being. Healthy foods will give you strength; fattening and sugar-filled foods can worsen your depression. Exercise produces natural stress reducers.

SHOP online if going to the mall is too stressful.

COPING STRATEGY — Have the phone number of your counselor, pastor, church, close friend or hotline already taped to your phone. Make the commitment to call someone if negative thoughts get fierce.

LIGHT — Get some sunshine. Winter can take its toll on your emotions by the loss of sun you experience.

INVITE a new (same-sex) friend to see a movie, have dinner or help decorate the house.

SET BOUNDARIES — Precisely explain to your family and friends what you are capable of doing this year, and what you aren't. Don't let others guilt you into taking on more than you can handle.

REACH OTHERS by discovering people who might be alone during the holidays.