

Holiday Survival Strategies

Every year, the drumbeat of holiday preparation starts earlier and earlier. Radio, TV, stores, and other people's casual comments urge everyone to get ready for the holidays. Unfortunately, the winter holidays are not a happy time for everyone. The holidays can be a lonely time. Many people find the holidays to be a hard time to get through. Stress, depression, sad memories and family fights seem worse during this season.



It can be exhausting to try to meet the holiday ideal. People can instead decide to focus on what is possible and positive about the holidays, and drop the parts that are not. Instead of just feeling bad, or wishing that they could feel better, there are things that people can do to help change their mood. They can do nice things for themselves, give themselves a pep-talk, change their ways of thinking and assumptions, and make sure to spend time with positive people. Here are some specific suggestions.

Do nice things for yourself

Do things that comfort yourself. Take a long bath. Sleep in. Do something you really enjoy that involves just you (or maybe a close trusted friend, too).

Plan to do some type of outdoor activity. Take a walk; go skiing if you're really brave! Exercise and cold, fresh air can really boost your mood!

Look for opportunities to hear some music. The papers often list holiday concerts that can offer some peace of mind and time out for you to catch your breath.

Give yourself a gift. You are an important person, and you have worked hard to get where you are. In all the rush of the holiday, take time to buy yourself something you would like- a new book, CD, or even just a cup of coffee. You deserve it!

Buy a toy or game for yourself. Maybe that the one toy you always wished you could have had as a child. Or, buy one you had that brings back good memories. Play with it with your own child, or a friend or family member. Even at the Dollar Store you can find something that would be fun - jacks, marbles, or a coloring book and NEW crayons.

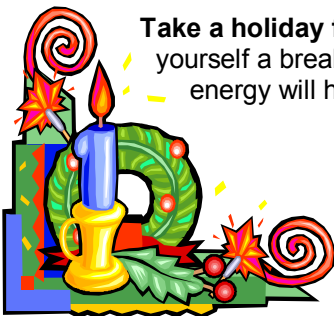
Give yourself a pep-talk

Put things into perspective. Self-talk, such as "It's just another day" and "I am not missing all that much, anyway", is very helpful to avoid the holiday blues.

Count your blessings. Get a blank book - it can be a nice journal or even a small spiral notebook. Begin with "Good things in my Life" and take a little time every day to write down a few of the good moments or things or blessings in your life. (Even on the WORST days, you can probably find one thing).

Write a "holiday" update for yourself. Make it like a letter and remind yourself how far you have come since last holiday season. Congratulate yourself on your progress. You can also use this time to set goals for yourself to work towards for next holiday season.

Take a holiday from your recovery work. If you have been focusing hard on your recovery, give yourself a break. Trying to heal under stress is harder. Getting some rest and restoring your energy will help you resume your work after the holidays.



Check your thinking and assumptions

Don't have high expectations. Be realistic about gatherings with family. Don't assume it is a time to heal conflicts with family members. If you must be with people with whom you feel uncomfortable, think of this as a holiday truce.

Consider whether you have to do everything during the holidays. Just because you "always did it" doesn't mean you can't create new traditions. Maybe you could make easier meals, or write your seasonal cards later (call them New Year's cards), or skip the baking this year.

Don't compare. The temptation is to think that the holidays are *supposed* to be a certain way. Avoid comparing your present experience to past, happier times. Don't compare your experience to what you see others doing.

Start a new tradition. A holiday is what you make it. No one wrote a rule book on what it has to be. Going to the movies on Christmas, for example, can be lots of fun (pretending the theater is your private home theater). Chinese restaurants are often open on Christmas.

Spend time with positive people

Plan activities with supportive people. Make things happen. Don't wait.

Be with people you trust and who understand and comfort you. There is usually someone, if only one person, with whom you feel safe. It's okay to lean on that person or people during the holidays.

Don't be afraid to say no to attending gatherings or to being around people or situations that may be uncomfortable. Plan something more positive during that time.



Have a safe and peaceful holiday season from

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