

25 Tips for Managing Stress, the Blues, and Grief during the Holidays

Rev. Tony Cooke

The holiday season is a time when many people get under stress, and others experience “the blues” and struggle in different ways. The holidays can be an especially difficult time for those that have lost a loved one recently. The following suggestions are offered with love to help you not only survive, but also to thrive during the holidays.

Plan ahead – this involves not only planning your time, but also planning how you will spend your money. Live by a budget, not by impulse.

Prioritize and decide how much you can actually do, how much you can (and should) actually spend, etc. You don’t want to start the new year with bills that you can’t pay. Do your best to create an atmosphere that focuses on “*doing*” rather than “*having*.”

Don’t be afraid to say, “No.” There may be some things you can do to reduce some of the demands on your life and time.

Pace yourself. People tend to overextend themselves and to commit to doing more than they possibly can in the limited time they have. Be careful during holidays not to over-commit. Don’t take on more than you can comfortably handle, and stop trying to be Superman or Superwoman by doing it all yourself.

Be realistic! Unrealistic and hyper-idealistic expectations set you up for disappointment.

Examine traditions – which ones do you want to keep? Is it time to establish some new ones?

Realize that each person is unique. What is enjoyable and fulfilling for one person may be stressful and unpleasant for another.

Some solitude is OK, but avoid excessive isolation. Reach out to people and make it a point to be with others. Especially seek out people who are supportive and care about you.

Reach out to an old friend you’ve lost contact with.

If you have some specific needs during the holidays, tell others. Don’t expect others to be mind-readers. Realize that others may not respond to or meet all of your needs.

Find a way to serve and help others. *“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found a way to serve.”* - Albert Schweitzer

Take care of yourself. If your tendency is to take care of everyone else and neglect yourself, do some special things just for you, and don’t let yourself feel guilty about it.

Be proactive. Don't wait for something to happen. Make something happen. Ask yourself about the kind of holiday experience you'd like to have, then ask, "*What can I do to make that happen?*" Don't accept a victim's mentality – you may be experiencing some circumstances you wouldn't have chosen, but there are things you can do to make the holidays better for yourself and others.

Remember the wisdom of the Serenity Prayer – "*Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*"

Don't focus on the past.

Don't dwell on what you don't have.

If you've experienced a significant loss, give yourself permission to grieve. There's often pressure to "put on a happy face" because of the season. Journaling can be a healthy and helpful way of identifying and expressing feelings you may experience during a difficult season of your life. Also, give yourself permission to enjoy the holidays in spite of your loss.

Moderation! Avoid the temptation to dive into extremes.

Take care of your health – Eat right, get plenty of rest, and exercise regularly. Common stress reactions during the holidays include headaches, over-eating, and difficulty sleeping.

Put some humor in your holidays. Laugh a lot! Rent a funny movie! *A merry heart does good like a medicine* (Proverbs 17:22).

Make a list of all the FREE things that can be enjoyed at Christmas... light displays, church services, community plays, etc. Partake of some of these.

Be honest about your own emotional health and your own personality tendencies. Do you need to address anger? Perfectionism? A tendency to blame others?

Focus on the spiritual aspects of the holidays.

Maintain or increase your spiritual disciplines. Philippians 4:6-7 (The Living Bible) *6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. 7 If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.*

Live a "Christmas life," not just Christmas day. Is it possible that part of our problems around the holidays is that we are trying to cram a year's worth of love, celebrating, remembering, etc., into a mere month?

Tony Cooke Ministries
P.O. Box 140187
Broken Arrow, OK 74014
Ph: (918) 645-9120
www.tonycooke.org