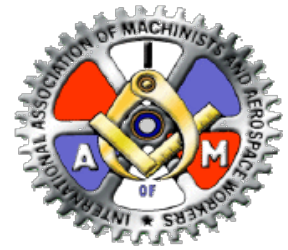




HELPING HANDS



How to Deal When Your Holidays Aren't Going to Look the Same This Year

(excerpts from wellandgood.com, written by Erin Bunch)

We've made it through some very difficult times this year. We have proven ourselves resilient, and now we have to survive a season that can be emotionally challenging under normal circumstances. That may be difficult during the holidays in 2020. For a lot of us, the last month is going to look far different than it usually does, and there's no way around how hard coping with that might shape up to be.

It's natural to crave the interpersonal connections usually associated with this time of year, says clinical psychologist Carla Marie Manly, PhD. "After months of being sequestered and at the mercy of dreary routines, it's only natural to crave a delight-filled holiday break," she says. "However, with the end of the pandemic nowhere in sight, it's important to shift our expectations for the upcoming holiday season."

With this shift may come unpleasant emotions such as sadness or frustration, and Tim Yovankin, MD, a Chicago-based psychiatrist says it's important to acknowledge those emotions and then try to strike a middle ground between the two extremes of repressing them and letting them overwhelm you. "A degree of compartmentalization is healthy—like everything else there is a time and place for it—but do not go overboard with it," he advises. "Take solace in knowing that these difficult times will pass, and remember, you have more control over the situation than you realize."

That control may lie in "reframing" and making the most out of what we do have and can do this year. "It's important to focus on enjoying the holidays in new ways," says Dr. Manly. Below, a few tips for making it through these last months of a difficult year, even if you can't share a cup of cocoa with your favorite granny.

Fully engage in whatever activities you keep on the calendar

In any other year, you might find yourself escaping into your phone after day two with the family. This year offers an opportunity to be more present. "With less to do and fewer places to go, this is a perfect opportunity to slow down and really savor your traditions" says Dr. Yovankin. "Whether it's baking cookies, decorating your home, or wrapping presents, approach each task with a grateful heart and give it your undivided attention." In other words, seize opportunities to practice mindfulness that will help you experience things more fully than you may have in more abundant years.

Prioritize connection

Dr. Yovankin and Dr. Manly suggest making relationships a priority. "In-person visits with beloved relatives may be off-limits this year due to COVID-19. Technology allows us to connect in other ways, whether you have a [virtual] tree-trimming party with relatives, complete with an adorable ornament, or a Christmas movie popcorn party via Zoom with friends, strive to focus on the joy of being connected in new ways. Take the time to send out some hand-written notes; not only are they thoughtful and fun to receive, the exercise of putting pen to paper is also therapeutic. Reach out to five people that you haven't spoken to in a while and five people that may need some extra love this season."

Exert control through creation

Be intentional with your time by using it to be engaged in creative tasks. "Challenge yourself to learn something new," Dr. Yovankin says. "Homemade and handmade items make wonderful gifts, if you will give them a try." DIY gifting, adding that there's another benefit to this approach, too. "The creative process is known to reduce stress, decrease anxiety, and create a flood of feel-good neurochemicals," Dr. Manly says.

(continued)

Tend to your mental health

Allow yourself to be aware of what you are feeling as you navigate this unprecedented experience. "Trust that your feelings are normal and that you're not alone," Dr. Manly says. It'll be important to lean on whatever mental health tools you have in your toolbox in order to moderate the feelings and keep them from dragging you down. "Whether you journal, talk to friends, chat with family members, or reach out to a therapist, remember to take good care of your mental health."

Try not to dwell on the past

Even the year your parents refused to gift you any more inexplicably covetable Pogs (look it up, kids) was better than this year. Comparing past seasons with this global trauma is not going to do your mental health any favors. "Comparisons—although natural—tend to minimize joy and increase feelings of depression and stress," says Dr. Manly. "For example, saying 'Ah, this year's holiday celebrations are uniquely quiet and beautiful in their own way' is far more uplifting than, 'The holidays are awful and dreary; everything was so much better last year'." Gratitude is always better!

If you're grieving the loss of a loved one

The holidays are always tough for those grieving. This year there are even more of us who are grieving than usual. Engage in support groups or whatever is appropriate for your circumstances. "Identify your support network," says Dr. Yankovin. Think about friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues—anyone who can sympathize and lend a good listening ear."

Your IAM EAP Representative can help find appropriate resources for your situation

IAM Peer Employee Assistance Program



The heart and soul of the District 141 Employee Assistance Program is the local lodge EAP peer coordinator. These dedicated men and women volunteer their personal time to assist other union members and their families who are experiencing personal difficulties. EAP peer coordinators do not make clinical diagnoses or clinical evaluations, however, they are trained to make a basic assessment of your situation and refer you to an appropriate resource for a more detailed evaluation. EAP peer coordinators will follow up to ensure you have been able to access services that addressed the difficulty you were experiencing.

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Tips for 2020 Holidays

(from APA.org)

Remember what's important

The barrage of holiday advertising can make you forget what the holiday season is really about. If your holiday expense list is running longer than your monthly budget, scale back and remind yourself that what matters most is loved ones, not store-bought presents, elaborate decorations or gourmet food.

Healthy conversations

Let your family know that holidays are times to express gratitude, appreciation and give thanks for what you all have, including each other. If there is worry about heated disagreements or negative conversations, focus on what you and your family have in common. Families might even plan activities they can do together that foster good fun and laughter, like playing a family game or looking through old photo albums.