

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 34

Celebrating the Holidays without Family Members

It's the holiday season. All around us are images of happy families, busy shoppers and perfect holiday dinners. For those of us who are facing the holidays alone, it may seem like we're the only ones without people to see and places to go. But that simply isn't true.

You are not alone

There are many people who are also spending the holidays by themselves. Some do it simply because they prefer it. Others because they do not have the financial means, or the time away from work to travel "home". Still others may find themselves alone after the loss of a loved one, or a divorce or separation. But whether you are a student on a tight budget, or a single mom with the kids away at their dad's, you can still enjoy your holidays. While everyone else is racing around shopping malls and stressing over time and money, spending the holidays alone is a golden opportunity to unwind, reflect and celebrate in your own way.

Plan ahead

The first rule to enjoying the season is to plan ahead. If your child is going to be away over the holidays, talk to them beforehand and plan out when you will celebrate together. If you have recently lost a loved one, talk to friends and family about your feelings as the holidays approach, and let them know how you are planning to celebrate or not celebrate the season.

Before the holidays arrive, have a good idea of what you would like to do. After all, this could be a fantastic chance to take time out, get a little selfish and indulge in all of your favourite things! Plan time alone doing things you enjoy, or don't usually have time to do. For example:

- Visit a museum or art gallery.
- Take a long walk and enjoy the decorated streets in your neighbourhood.
- Start a new hobby or rediscover an old one.
- Cook your favourite dinner.
- Call or write to family and friends.
- Take on a home project you've been meaning to get done.
- Organise photos and scrapbooks.
- Read a good book.
- Rent your favourite movies or ones you've been wanting to see.

Some people even suggest making a "solo party emergency kit" long before the holidays start. Fill it with your favourite holiday treats, music and anything else that makes you feel content and indulged. You can even buy yourself a special gift to open on the appropriate day. But, remember to plan how you will spend your money as well as how you will spend your time. Buying extravagant gifts or luxuries that blow your budget will only make you feel worse when its time to pay the bills. Be realistic with both your time and money, and you'll enjoy yourself more.

* Permission to photocopy with credit given to Jennifer McCarthy, Family Service Canada Consultant.

Celebrating the Holidays without Family Members *(continued)*

Find other ways to be with people

Just as you should take the time to enjoy being alone during the holidays, you should also plan activities that will bring you together with other people. There's a line that separates being alone from being lonely. Make sure you know where yours is and plan to go out and be with other people when your "lonely" time hits. For example, you could:

- Volunteer to help those who need it.
- Do something with friends.
- Organise an "orphan" party for other people who are alone during the holidays.
- Take part in community events and activities.
- Attend religious services at a local church, synagogue, mosque or temple.
- Look for singles' organisations or other social clubs that are holding special events.
- Visit an elderly relative or neighbour who is also alone.
- If you are overseas, you can seek out your fellow citizens and go to, or even plan, activities that remind you of home.

Deal with your emotions

While some people love the freedom of spending the holidays by themselves, others can expect to feel some negative emotions, regardless of how carefully they have planned their solo adventure.

Being far away from family and friends can make you feel sad, depressed, even lonely and hurt. People who have recently lost a loved one or been divorced need to recognise their grief and deal with those feelings. Trying to hide by overindulging with food, alcohol or credit cards will only make things worse. Set aside a time to deal with negative emotions. Remembering a lost loved one through a special holiday ritual, such as creating a decoration to hang on the tree, can also help ease the pain.

But, no matter why you are alone, don't beat yourself up about feeling down. Acknowledge the

feelings, have a good cry and then make the decision to get on with your holiday. The best part about being alone is that you get to set your own schedule. If you feel like being with people, then go out. If not, stay home and treat yourself to something special. By taking care of yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually, you will make your holidays more enjoyable and relaxed.

Let go of unrealistic expectations

We all know and feel the pressure of creating that "perfect holiday". This time of year surrounds us with memories, movies, songs and images of family and friends happily gathered together over extravagant feasts and presents. But is that really what the holidays are like?

No one outside the movies and TV commercials can really live up to such high standards for the holiday season. Now is the time to let go of all the unrealistic expectations you may have about this time of year, and create your own traditions. No one is forcing you to cook a 20-pound turkey or buy dozens of expensive gifts. Being alone over the holidays gives you greater freedom to celebrate exactly as you see fit. So, take your time, relax, renew and, most importantly, *enjoy* a happy holiday season.

Online Resources

Alone for the Holidays by James Rea.

http://psychcentral.com/library/holidays_alone.htm

Grief and the holidays: Coping on your own terms from MayoClinic.com

<http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/FL/00055.html>

Home for the Holidays: Alone but not Blue by Brett McWhorter Sember

<http://www.divorceinteractive.com/consumer/ArticleSearch.asp?ID=231>

Hurting Holidays: Your first holidays alone can be difficult by Sheri and Bob Stritof

<http://marriage.about.com/library/weekly/aa122200a.htm>

Single Parenting through the Holidays by Dr. Lois V. Nightingale

<http://www.divorce.com/CA/ARTICLES/nightingale5.html>

Surviving Holidays away from Home by Diana Rowland

<http://www.rowlandandassociates.com/Surviving.htm>

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920