



A Monthly Guide for Cultivating Staff and Family Wellness | November, 2020 | Issue 3

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WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER AND HOW TO COMBAT IT

According to MaycoClinic.org, Seasonal Affective Disorder (also known as SAD), "is a type of depression related to changes in seasons." Many people may notice significant changes in mood as the winter months approach and this is not by accident. Though some of this is biological in nature, factors like reduced daylight hours, colder weather, increased work and financial stress, pressure of the holidays, familial strife, amongst others often leads to a flare up of depressive symptoms. These outside forces impact our neurotransmitters (such as a decrease in dopamine and an increase in serotonin) and make overcoming the 'winter blues' rather difficult. If battling a seasonal mood disorder isn't tough enough, it can occur during a time when American Society suggests that we should be at our cheeriest. This can leave sufferers feeling even more isolated if we can't bring ourselves to muster up the holiday spirit that every tv show, movie, and our peers feel we should be experiencing.

Though Seasonal Affective Disorder is not curable, it is definitely treatable and by getting to know your mood patterns more intimately, you can put in place protective factors to reduce the intensity and duration of your symptoms. The following list includes ways that you can effectively combat symptoms of SAD:

- Keep a journal of your moods & emotions when you notice a flare up. Jot down the time of day, events that took place before and after the flare up, and how you reacted to these symptoms (sleeping, overeating, crying, isolation) etc. As previously stated, knowing what SAD looks and feels like for you will give you a better insight and help you know where to start.
- If able, increase your support system. Talk to trusted others about your symptoms and make plans to check in with each other (in-person or virtually if socially distancing). Depression has a funny way of making us feel that no one cares or that we are burdening others with our sadness, which serves to perpetuate the depressive cycle. Talk to people about what you are experiencing and allow people that you care about to help you through it.
- Understand your unhealthy coping strategies and try to replace them with healthier alternatives. Do you reach for comfort food when depressed? I do. And though this may feel good in the moment, it is often followed by feelings of shame, guilt, and weight increases. Each time you think of ordering takeout to fight that feeling of sadness, opt for a visit with a friend, a healthier meal alternative, or any activity that will also get that dopamine flowing (such as the gym, a walk in your neighborhood, or watching a comedy special on Netflix).
- Refill your medication. Many of us have been prescribed medication by our doctor to combat seasonal or major depressive disorders. Be sure to keep up with your medication and avoid lapses in doses (which can mess with the chemical signals in our brains). If you take your medication seasonally, be sure to visit your doctor and request a refill as anti-depressant medications need about 30-60 days to

get working in our systems.

- Schedule an appointment with a therapist BEFORE the symptoms start. Oftentimes, things like making phone calls and scheduling appointments can feel like monumental tasks when we're depressed. This is why understanding our patterns is so important as this can allow us to make appointments with our primary care physician or therapist before we start to feel the heavier symptoms of depression. A good rule of thumb is to do the work while you feel good so that everything is in place for you when you don't.

Depression looks different for everyone and you are NOT alone. Depression is extremely common and with additional factors such as COVID-19, civil and social unrest, a tough election year, and other heavy topics, depression rates have significantly increased. Talk to your loved ones and remember to check in on one another this holiday season. If your symptoms ever become unmanageable or disrupt your daily functioning, do not hesitate make an appointment with your mental health care provider immediately.

MANAGING COVID-19 RELATED HOLIDAY DISAPPOINTMENT



With the impact of COVID-19 still very much looming over our daily lives, it's hard not to wonder how this will impact our beloved holiday celebrations. With many of us typically hosting gatherings or traveling to be with loved ones for the holidays, it may be tough to figure out how to cultivate that feeling of togetherness with guidance encouraging continued use of social distancing and avoidance of large gatherings. Additionally, many of us have opted not to have visits with older or sick relatives which may trigger additional emotions as the holidays approach.

Whether you are parent, caregiver, or child, having to adjust your idea of what the holiday season *should* look like may be difficult and it's important to know how to

care for yourself and your little ones as we navigate pandemic related trauma during a season typically marked by togetherness and joy. An article written by Amy Adolfo Signore, PhD, MPH and Emily Wakefield, PsyD outlines some ways to cope with "Holiday Disappointment" broken down by age!

0-3 years old: Focus on quality time during the holidays - and don't worry about the details.

- Children this age will not be able to recall detailed memories of holidays past and will not recall the events of this year in the future.
- It's okay to keep things very simple for children this age in terms of celebrations and explanations.
- All children benefit from having quiet-down time to feel love and attention from parents. With social distancing and quarantine measures in place, this is the perfect season to indulge kids with affection.

4-6 years old: Create new, quarantine-approved holiday traditions.

- Establish traditions within your immediate family - make holiday decorations, make a home-made gift, cook a special meal.
- Instead of in-person visits with friends, family or even Santa, consider fun ways to have a video interaction, write letters or make cards.
- Don't punish children for having a negative reaction to holiday changes this year. Tell them that it's okay to feel sad, disappointed or angry.
- Find the positive and teach positive self-talk. For example, "Since we don't have to travel, we get extra time to relax and play at home."

6-12 years old: Help your child cope with holiday blues - and build resilience for the future.

- At this age, children understand the precautions that need to be taken due to COVID-19.
- Validate their feelings of disappointment and sadness about changes to their holiday traditions: It's normal and OK to feel angry, frustrated or sad.
- Remember that helping children overcome

disappointment helps them build resiliency.

- Ask them for their ideas about how to make the holiday special.
- Teach fun relaxation strategies - try yoga for the first time, or practice slowly breathing in and out the scent of a favorite treat, lotion or candle.

13-18 years old: Ask, listen and encourage COVID-safe holiday activities.

- Ask teens how they are feeling.
- Let them know you are there if they need to talk.
- Listen! Often, teens just want someone to listen and not solve the problem for them.
- Offer perspective on the situation by looking at the big picture.
- Allow them a sense of control by giving them choices - maybe to have friend over on a different day to celebrate the holiday, or allow them to plan a special activity.
- Encourage positive social activities to honor the holiday season, such as how to volunteer in a socially distanced way.

Parents and caregivers: Manage your own disappointment about this holiday season.

- Allow yourself to feel sad, worried or angry.
- Do something to nurture yourself.
- Adjust your expectations.
- Look at the big picture.
- Children take cues from their parents. If you maintain a positive, festive and calm demeanor, your kids will pick up on that and do the same.

For more resources included with this article, visit <https://www.connecticutchildrens.org>

WHY LESS MONEY SHOULDN'T MEAN LESS HOLIDAY SPIRIT



Western society (and particularly capitalistic societies) have a way of taking things that are inherently free and selling them back to us at an inflated price. Things like wellness, holidays, and many other concepts that should focus on a mental state have been marked with a price tag that many of us feel compelled to keep up with.

The holiday season takes this to an elevated level by convincing us that in order to enjoy the holidays, we must be prepared to drastically empty our wallets by purchasing gifts, often overpriced decorations, and hundreds of dollars in groceries to prepare holiday meals. Though these things can add some fun to the season, they should not be a requirement in order to fully enjoy the season. Remember, the goal of marketing executives is to convince you that you need whatever it is they are selling. From spoons, to candles, to computers—you cannot live unless you purchase this item. The problem is that this has made many of us who may not have the means to engage in these extravagantly pricey exchanges that we ultimately cannot afford to be cheery during this season.

Take a second to reflect on your values and why you enjoy (if you celebrate) the holidays. Once you have identified these values, brainstorm ways you can showcase these values without breaking your bank. Instead of an elaborate decoration scheme, opt for dollar store decorations. Rather than buying all of your friends and family gifts,

suggest a Secret Santa or write endearing letters to those you love expressing your appreciation for them.

Now what if you have NO extra money to spend? Absolutely nothing because that is perfectly okay too! Life and finances get tough and we will not always be able to afford sometimes even the smallest of items. Spend time practicing gratitude for the things in your life that money can't buy and surround yourself with people who do not attach your value to them to the amount of money you can spend on seasonal trinkets. Remind yourself that the holiday spirit is a mindset and not a series of items and navigating the season will seem a little less tedious on a budget. Be sure to keep a look out for free activities that can foster that seasonal joy without costing you a cent!

A MINDFUL REMINDER



During a season where marketing executives go straight for our wallets and convince us that we would just be happier *if...* I encourage you and your loved ones to implement mindfulness and gratitude practices into your daily routine. Remember, mindfulness suggests that you have everything you need to be happy in this very moment and that item that says it will drastically change your life, probably won't. Avoid impulsive and disruptive spending and fill your mind with thoughts of thankfulness for what you may already have in front of you.

Remember, mindfulness, like many other things is a practice and works best if you *practice* a little of it every day.

STRESS & STRESS MANAGEMENT



With people reporting higher rates of stress during the winter & holiday months, our Early Learning team has provided some tips and information from the PAT curriculum to help with stress management as we attempt to navigate holiday season during a global pandemic!

DON'T FORGET FOOD SAFETY

Festive gatherings with food and family can be a wonderful edition to the holidays, so don't spend your days battling a food-borne illness. Be sure to observe all food safety regulations when preparing and storing your food to ensure you spend your holidays in the dining room and not in the bathroom. See the tips provided by our Health & Nutrition team on food safety below!

FOOD SAFETY TIPS

This holiday season and throughout the year, follow these 11 tips to reduce your risk of foodborne illness.

Suds up for 20 seconds.
Wash hands with soap under warm, running water before and after handling food to fight bacteria.

Start with a clean scene.
Wash cutting boards, dishes, countertops and utensils with hot water and soap.

Keep foods separate.
Separate raw meat, seafood and eggs from other foods in your grocery shopping cart, grocery bags and in your refrigerator.

Don't rinse meat or poultry.
It is not a safety step and can spread germs around your kitchen.

Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below.
Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers within two hours.

Rinse fresh fruits and veggies
under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.

Place meat and poultry in plastic bag provided at the meat counter, and keep it in the plastic bag in your refrigerator at home.

Never defrost at room temperature.
Safely defrost food in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave.

Use a food thermometer.
Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that causes illness.

Clean out your fridge.
No leftovers past 3-4 days.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Learn more about food safety at StoryOfYourDinner.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Head Start & Early Head Start New Location!
808 W. Newgrove St.
Lancaster, CA 93534

NEW Head Start Center in Lancaster!

Now Enrolling Children Ages Zero to Five!

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Our new location will offer full day/5 days a week once centers reopen. While centers remain closed we are offering virtual services.

Virtual services provide schedule flexibility that families need to balance work, school, and other challenges. Our teaching staff will work with your schedule and needs to individualize Virtual Head Start Services for your child.

Services that are available to you include:

- Virtual interactions with your teacher and weekly activity kits.
- Grab N Go meals.
- Diapers and wipes for enrolled children as needed.
- Access to health, nutrition, disabilities, mental health and family engagement services for you and your child.

Enroll Your Child Today! Visit www.ccrcca.org/headstart or call 818-717-4515.