



First Baptist Church

Parish Nursing Notes

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“I praise You because I am
Fearfully and Wonderfully
made....”(Psalms 139:14)

Holiday Blues and Health

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“**The Holidays**”—That time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s. For most is a time of joy, family, and fellowship. But for many it is not. There are several reasons this can be so. For some it goes back to **Family of Origin issues**, those things that happened in one’s family that still cause discomfort and emotional pain. It can also be the result of **Seasonal Affective Disorder**. Yet another culprit is the incongruency of one’s deep religious faith and the glitz and marketing of stores that seem to take away from The Holidays’ true meaning. And one of the most important reasons for Holiday Blues is grief and loss, whether it is from long ago or recently.

In understanding why Holiday Blues can be so powerful we should consider some theory about how we remember emotional things. There are several parts of the brain that are involved in emotional memory storage. One main area is the amygdala. This is a part of the brain that rests between the brain stem and the cerebral cortex. It is the repository of emotional memory and it functions somewhat independently of parts of the brain that function with logic. It also has no concept of time. So when a person is reminded of a time, primarily through the senses such as sound, smell, taste, or touch, the amygdala is activated for memory and remembers important times from the past. It just does not know if it we five minutes ago or twenty years ago. The outcome is we feel an emotional response that would seem out of proportion to what is now going on. Theory has it that this can be a significant reason we can be visited by a rough time during a time that should be happy.

While grief is the main reason for **Holiday Blues**, first consider briefly the other items. Family of Origin issues can be so important because they have been ingrained in us from early childhood, and the pain, sadness, or discomfort stays with us even into adulthood. The reasons can be many. In some cases the Holidays were just not a big deal, hence, a person may want to really celebrate but just cannot capture the festive moment. Another major reason for some is the Holidays meant increased drinking and fighting in families. This created a painful irony during a time that should be so festive. There can be many other reasons for this to carry into the present but the bottom line is that they play into making for a less than joyous time. Be gracious to yourself. The brain function mentioned earlier keeps you from “just getting over it” without deep personal reflection or even personal therapy.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a condition that many suffer from which is thought to be related to decreased sunlight in winter. It causes varying degrees of depression that can significantly impact a sufferer. If you think you might have this it is treatable and your physician should be consulted.

Religious disappointment can be powerful for some. As we start to see Christmas decorations in stores two weeks before Halloween, we can be greatly saddened by the loss of the meaning of this time of joy. It is important to become involved in positive ways with your personal religious tradition in order to focus on what is really important, and not the glitz and glamour of retail marketing.

Probably the most common reason for Holiday down-time is the memory of the loss of a loved one. The can be either a recent loss or one from many years ago the surfaces in Holiday times. Again, the discussion of the amygdala helps explain why the impact and memory of grief is so intense. As we hear the songs and smell the smells of the season, we remember times past. It can be bittersweet because there can be happy memories mixed in with the sad. As you move through your grief (and it is moving through, you cannot get over it or around it, you must move through it) you might be able to rethink your pain as a time of honoring the one who has died. This is a process that does not happen quickly, but can be done. As you encounter a cherished and yet painful memory, think of your hurt as a tribute to the one lost. If you did not love them, you would not feel this way.

Be Gracious To Yourself!!!

What can you do to move through this season more effectively? Here are a few brief, but self-explanatory ideas:

Talk honestly about your grief and don't isolate yourself
Consciously eliminate stress and stressful situations
Be with supportive and comforting people
Be selective with what you are willing to do
Plan ahead and be intentional on gatherings
Treasure your memories of the one you have lost
Reflect on your own purpose in life
Express and enhance your own faith resources
Decide which traditions you will keep or change
Pray

Here are also some ideas you can do for others who may also be experiencing a difficult Holiday Season:

Be a good listener
Provide assurance and reassurance
Be available
Reach out, volunteer
Be patient and understanding
Stay in touch with friends and loved ones
Pray

Remember there is no one way to move through grief. It does not proceed with an exact plan. Each person does their grief in different ways. There is a point where normal grief becomes what is called Complicated Bereavement. When this happens you may want to seek the help of a therapist to deal with the underlying issues that are complicating your grief. You might even need to consult your doctor to see if medications are warranted. **Don't forget—be GRACIOUS with yourself.** You will move through this and

For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope....Jeremiah 29:11

During this Christmas season, my prayer for you is that the Peace of God will fill to overflowing your heart, soul, mind, and spirit..... and that you will experience a special blessing of LOVE.