

Another COVID-19 Challenge: Dealing with loneliness during the holiday season

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Welcome to today's webinar about COVID-19. The title of today's presentation is "Another COVID-19 Challenge: "Dealing With Loneliness During the Holiday Season."

Today we'll discuss

Today, we're going to talk about the typical holiday expectations that we have each year versus the holiday realities of 2020. We're going to talk about things you can control and things you can't control. We're going to talk about ways that you can actually take steps to make your holidays happier this year. And then we're also going to talk about looking beyond 2020.

Typical holiday expectations

Typical holiday expectations might be, oh, all the fun and the hoopla and the gifts and parties and get-togethers and so forth. But even the typical holidays aren't all good. We often feel very stressed out trying to pull everything together at this time of year. We wind up spending a lot of money and many of us wind up under a lot of pressure and tension. And let's not forget that even during normal holiday seasons, not necessarily COVID, it's a time of year when we're reminded of losses, and many people feel lonely this time of year, every year. However, this year does present a special challenge.

COVID-19 holiday realities

So, the COVID-19 holiday realities include that our gatherings are going to have to be smaller, or they may even have to be postponed. You may not be able to travel the distance that you need to or want to see friends and family. You're going to have to hopefully avoid any kind of super-spreader situations where COVID could be highly contagious in a group. And I guess if you want to look at the upside, the upside could be that you're going to be challenged to invent some new traditions for this year. And thank goodness we have technology to help us. So, yes, as a result, many of us are going to wind up being alone and wind up having very down-scaled holiday celebrations this year, but we still can do things to make the holidays special.

It comes down to control – and knowing what's in your hands

It comes down to control, knowing what you can control and what you can't control, and then not getting aggravated about what you can't control. So, for instance, if COVID is spiking around the holidays, there's nothing you can do to change that. That is something that is nationwide, really worldwide. And it's not in your control. It's not in your control if there are health restrictions or state travel restrictions that are set up that keep you from getting to where you usually go for the holidays or where you wanted to go this year.

And it's not in your control if your company cancels their party because they don't want to have a super-spreader event or even take any chances of having too many people together, or if the parties are smaller or whatever. All of that is not within your control. But there are still a lot of things in your control, and they boil down to what you're thinking, how you're acting and what you're doing, and what your overall attitude is.

Steps you can take to make these holidays happier

So, what steps can you take specifically to make these 2020 holidays happier? First is the point that I made a little earlier, but it's worth repeating. Some people find the holidays sad every single year because it reminds them of people who have been lost, people who have died, people who've moved away. It may remind them of old traditions that they don't incorporate into their holidays anymore.

So, know that for starters. Next, remember that you can make 2020 a happy holiday season even with limitations. So, the steps are to figure out what's really most important to you about the holidays. Plan to make some of those things happen, maybe in some kind of an adapted way or something like that, but plan to fulfill some of those things that you really love in a safe way. Beware of social media during the holidays. Let yourself feel your feelings. Remember to give back. And finally, practice gratitude.

What's most important to you?

So, let's take those one by one. First, figure out what's really important to you about the holidays. Are you just in love with all the cooking and baking? Is it about being with other people? Is it about putting on your finery and your special outfits and jewelry and holiday sweaters that you save all year? Is it about making your house or apartment or wherever you live merry with decorations? Is it about feeling connected with other people or just being in a great party mood? Or is it about spiritual or religious feelings?

Now, you may have something that's important to you that's not even on this list, and so, go ahead and add it for yourself. And you can check off more than one, because it's not like one thing has to be important. But it is good to know what the things are that count for you.

What can you plan?

So, now that you know what's important, what are the things that you can plan to try to meet some of those needs that you have? You can do things like, starting right now, to get in touch with friends and family members and even those long-lost friends that you haven't talked to in 10 years to set up appointments or dates for phone or video chat calls.

You can plan to have meals via video chat so that you're really eating together. You can even plan some games. You can have sing-alongs, you can carol together. There's lots that you can do online together using your tablet or your phone or your laptop or computer where you could really share a lot of things together, but not in the same space. So, that's virtually together.

Also, if religious and spiritual parts of the holidays matter a lot to you, find out when your area religious groups are going to be meeting or holding virtual services. Or sometimes I hear, I know that there are parking lot services and traditions that are carried out. You can still attend, maybe the, what you're interested in will be live-streamed. You can mail out your holiday cards as usual.

You can reach out to nearby friends and neighbors and organize some COVID-safe celebrations. Maybe make them small. Make them outside, if the weather is permitting, or if you have some of those heaters, or if you're in a warm area, it will be even easier for you. And you know, if you don't have parties to go to, that doesn't eliminate making dates to have brunch or lunch or some other kind of get-together where you feel connected and you can spend time with somebody else, either in a socially-distanced situation, or again, virtually.

You can even just check and find out when your favorite holiday movies are on TV and plan a movie night. You can do that for yourself, for yourself and your cat or your dog. Also, you can watch a movie together virtually by setting up a video chat with someone and watching the same movie at the same time so you're kind of watching it together.

How can you keep social media in check during the holidays?

Now, I do want to mention social media and the holidays, and maybe social media all the time. I'd like you to keep in mind that when people post things on social media, they're usually posting great things, exciting things, beautiful things, happy things. And when you're

feeling lonely or a little bit blue or depressed over the holidays, staying attached to social media can make you feel like you're missing out on something.

So, I'd like you to remember that people don't post or share online the arguments they may be having, or the disasters that may be happening in their households, which we all know are part of reality. So, I do want to warn you about social media. It's really a warning that's important all year 'round, but seems even more important over the holidays.

Don't let yourself get immersed in social media and feel as if everyone is having a fabulous time except for you. Remember, we are all affected by COVID. Everybody is playing by the same rules, hopefully, if they want to stay safe and they're smart this holiday season.

How do you really feel?

Think about your feelings, and not only think about your feelings, but feel your feelings. Be aware of what it is you're feeling and really accept it because it's human to have feelings.

You may be feeling angry about this whole COVID thing. I know I am. You may be feeling resentful or frustrated or wishing the whole thing would be over already. You may have COVID fatigue that they're talking about, where people are just sick and tired of the masks and the social distancing. These are all real feelings. And so, be kind to yourself if you're having some yucky feelings, and accept them. Know that they are completely normal.

And you know, if you need to, and gosh, I need to all the time, reach out for support. Call a friend, call us if you want some professional help, and that's great, too, to get some support and to help yourself move through those feelings.

How can you give to others?

I also want to spend a minute talking about giving to others, because it's magical. It's hard to believe how wonderful it feels to give even just a little bit to other people, because it makes you feel like a superhero. And that's the payoff. You're helping other people, and at the same time, it feels great. And you don't even have to do any big, big deal.

You could deliver meals to people who can't get out to get meals. You could offer to run errands for seniors in your community. And sometimes communities have a virtual online blackboard or community board where they can post needs that they have, or post a service that you're willing to provide that you will run errands on Tuesdays or Wednesdays or whatever works for you. Get in touch with a local soup kitchen to see if you can donate or to see if there's a way for you to actually volunteer safely to serve food.

You might want to share your talents. Maybe you're an undercover singer or you have a wonderful talent for playing musical instruments. If that's so, see if a local nursing home might like you to provide some entertainment virtually, again, because you're probably going to find that COVID will not allow you to go there yourself. But how nice if you can lead a sing-along or sing some songs yourself, or do anything else virtually for a nursing home. Help out at a local animal shelter. This is a great thing to do. We, I think you know, most people are aware that pets, just petting pets is therapeutic and makes you feel good. And if you volunteer some time at a local pet shelter, you can also give the employees some time off for the holidays.

And then there are the old standbys, of course, like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, who are always doing important things, and find out what they're doing and see if there's any way that you can help. And I forgot to write this down, but Toys for Tots is another wonderful way to offer help, offer to pick up or provide a drop spot or something like that. There are so many ways to give back, and I promise you, and you can hold me to this, that you will feel wonderful when you give back.

Be grateful

Finally, don't forget to be grateful. even amidst all of the disruption that we're experiencing and how different everything may be this year over the holidays, most of us still have things to be grateful for, like our communities having come together during the pandemic.

I don't know if you've experienced this, but I certainly have, that the pandemic has, well, has helped me get to know my neighbors. I didn't know a lot of them, and certainly being out walking and spending time outside, especially over the summer months when we were in lockdown, many of us got to know each other, and that's great.

We have to be grateful for all the people who have been working on the front lines. It's a time to really appreciate your immediate family and your pets. You know, you may have been spending more than ample time with your immediate family because of virtual school and because of working at home and everything. And even so, look around at whoever is close to you, whether it's friend or family, and do spend time appreciating that person or those people.

The pandemic may have even given you time to reconsider some of your life choices. This is really a biggie. A lot of people have found that being at home and not being able to do their normal routine has given them opportunities to try some new things. People have tried knitting or painting or gardening during the summer, things that they never really had time for during their, so to speak, normal lives.

And so, another thing to be grateful for might be that you've had some time, actually a lot of time, to think about your life. And you may come out of that much more appreciative, and you may also come out of it with some new thoughts about what you plan to do in the future. So, don't forget to be grateful, even though you may be feeling lonely at times.

Keep hope in your holidays

And finally, keep hope in your holidays. We all are looking forward to improved health, hopefully a vaccine, more treatments for COVID, lots of emotional, mental, and physical healing, and hopefully some return to normalcy in the coming months and year ahead. So, try to be optimistic and remember how far we have come, that I know right now, I'm speaking during a spike in cases.

However, I do remember six or seven months ago when there were no treatments whatsoever, and people really didn't know what to do about COVID, and a vaccine seemed like it would be years and years and years and years away. These things have changed. Things have improved a little bit. There still have been tragic losses and setbacks, but do try to keep hope in your holidays.

Conclusion

Thank you for attending, and I hope that some of these tips will be really helpful to you. Thank you.

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