



MANAGING HOLIDAY EMOTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

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The holidays ahead will bring some turbulent moments, as our special traditions collide with the uncertain and restrictive reality of living during COVID-19. The truth is, we feel terrible because the pandemic is terrible. For all of us. People around us are dying, recovering from illness, facing unemployment or financial hardship, hurting over growing inequities, and losing hope. We are all coping the best we can - but make no mistake, no one is themselves. We are all struggling. We are no longer at our best, not even close. Despite our attempts to reawaken the feelings of seasonal joy and meaningful connection with loved ones, troubling emotions like fear, sadness, and frustration are pressing in on all of us. There is little “normal” right now, even during these holidays. Most of us feel a growing sense of dread, as we realize that the potential for disappointment is high in the days ahead. So, what do we do?

Here are some things we’ve learned from global aid workers, emergency responders, and community caregivers who have found a way to keep going during hard times. These “lessons learned” may help you manage emotions during the pandemic.

- **Be realistic about the challenges you face.** Learn all you can about what we’re up against. Focus on getting facts, and avoid endless speculation. The better you understand COVID-19, the wiser you will be about how to celebrate the holidays safely. *Denial is a poor substitute for competence.*
- **Aim at achieving “good enough” rather than the ideal.** This is particularly true during the holidays, when the impulse to recreate favorite memories and experiences can lead to disappointment if the pandemic gets in the way. Do all you can to make things *as good as they can be*, thereby reducing last minute frustration when things don’t work out as well as you hoped. Make the holidays tolerable. That is good enough under these circumstances.
- **Energize all you do with the power of human kindness and gratitude.** By generously caring for loved ones, friends, and even complete strangers, you will tap into a lifegiving force that will permeate and fill your heart. There is a mountain of research that proves this is true. We need to practice kindness and gratitude now more than ever, both for the wellbeing of others as well as ourselves.
- **Remind yourself that dark times bring fertile ground for doing something meaningful.** As expressed in many religious traditions, adversity brings opportunity for growth. This time is not a tragic parentheses in an otherwise satisfactory life. Reframe the pandemic as the latest chapter in your story. It is your reality right now, so learn what you can from it. It won’t last forever, but its impact is clearly changing our present and future. Keep growing so you can keep up.