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# Combating the Holiday "Blahs"

*by*

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**T**HE warm glow of a fire, family gatherings over a hearty meal, the thrilling anticipation of getting just what you want, the wonderful sense of giving, the idea of a peaceful world without cynicism; these images hibernate in our unconsciousness, ready to spring forth each year at the holiday season.

**B**UT these scenes may not be what we actually experience. Even when we have a loving family around us and things are going fine, we may feel like the season isn't as wonderful as we remember it, or as we want it to be. We forget that our fantasies are based on childhood experiences when the world was our oyster, when we could be continuously surprised, when life was without responsibility, and we magically received gifts we wished for. As adults, we have responsibilities and we can experience disappointment and loss. We know that there is no assurance that tomorrow will be a sunny day and that

all we have to do is go out and play. The holidays may remind you that we aren't children any more.

**E**VEN in families where we had good experiences of the holidays, some years may not have been so wonderful. In other families, annual family get-togethers may have been battlegrounds torn by alcoholism or physical or verbal abuse. The holidays may continue to be marked by bickering, jealousy, and tension. The otherwise festive season can be bitter reminders of what we had as well as what we never had.

**T**HE challenge of gift giving may also diminish the glitter of the holiday season. For many of us, holiday shopping is an agonizing form of torture. The frustration that we experience when we insist on finding the perfect gift is exquisite. We want to get just the right thing, at just the right price, to create a lasting emotional bond with

the worthy "givee." Alas, the chances of doing that are less than those of winning the Florida lottery. But, as if this were not painful enough, all of us want to receive the perfect gift. When we don't, we think, "If they really loved me, they would have known what I wanted." The giving season offers untold opportunities for a cruel mixture of frustration, regret, and betrayal.

**D**ISAPPOINTED, thinking that things should be different and better, we sometimes float through the season more concerned with what is not happening than what is. We become passive observers, crying for someone to reach out, take us by the hand, and lead us to the promised Santa-land. We experience headaches, anxiety, stomachaches, insomnia, and a raft of other holiday delights. We may withdraw or we may plunge into action as a brave warrior in a losing battle.

**W**HEN life does not match our good memories or our hopes and fantasies, when the warm glow of television commercials contradicts our experience, the holiday season may become a cruel irony compounded by guilt that we can't make it right. If any of this seems true for you, you may be a victim of the "holiday blahs." Unless you decide to meet this challenge with your reality lights on bright, the truth is, it's not going to get any better.

**E**VEN as an adult, delight comes from the realm of our child-mind. As children, it was our parents' job to help us learn how to turn that delight on. When we have not learned to create our own happiness our adult years are spent waiting for someone else to turn that light on for us. The secret in approaching the holidays is not to wait for others to make us happy; it is for us to create our own happiness.

**T**HE first way to create joy is to be realistic in our expectations. Rather than looking for the perfect and most expensive gift, do something that you believe the other person will enjoy - something that takes your time, caring, and most of all, your interaction with the other person. You could go for a hike in the woods together, make a kite and plan a time to fly it together, get tickets to a play, go on a trip, invite someone over for dinner, offer to fix some things around the house, write a special poem, or “borrow” someone else’s child and go to the zoo.

**T**HE second way to create happiness is to do something in memory of a loved one you miss - something they would have done and/or would be pleased if they knew you had done it. You might visit a children’s hospital and comfort a sick child. You might spend the night in a homeless shelter or take gifts to a needy family. As you do this special task, imagine the loved one is there in spirit, enjoying the experience, too.

**T**HE third way to create your own satisfaction is to plan some time to be alone. When we arrange to spend time alone, we are taking care

of ourselves rather than feeling rejected or isolated. Read that book you’ve been meaning to read, or write that short story you’ve got in your gut. Take some walks down by the river, and let your mind run free. Do something fun that you have never done before for any reason at all. You will be very surprised at what you feel.

**T**HERE are a few “don’ts.” Don’t drink when (or because) you are alone and melancholy, or unhappy in the midst of seemingly happy people. Because the alcohol will serve as a depressant, it will magnify your disappointments and feelings of isolation.

Food and drugs may also do the same things when we try to use them to avoid the unpleasant feelings we are having.

**W**HEN having negative feelings, it is best to acknowledge the undesirable feelings and then create a plan of action that will lead to your feeling better.

**A**S you create a vision of your holidays, open your heart and turn on your planning mind. You may be pleasantly amazed at how being the loving caretaker to your inner child can produce a satisfying and enjoyable holiday experience.