Santa Paula Unified School District

Mental Health Matters

December 2024

Supporting Your Mental Health During the Holiday Season

In the 2003 holiday movie classic, "Elf," the main character, Buddy, shares a particular fondness for the holiday season, "The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear!" No matter what traditions you celebrate this winter, not everyone shares Buddy's enthusiasm for this season. While the holidays can be a time of celebration and joy for many, it also can be a period of stress, sadness, and loneliness for others—and sometimes can be particularly difficult for people living with mental health and substance use conditions.

A survey conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that 64 percent of individuals living with a mental illness reported that their conditions worsened around the holidays. Whether due to separation from loved ones, personal grief, the pressures of gift-giving, economic hardship, challenging interactions with family members, or shorter days, this time of year can bring unique behavioral health challenges.

As we approach the holiday season, it is important to remember that it is very common to feel added stress — and this stress can worsen symptoms of a mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety, or a substance use disorder. However, there are ways to help address the stress or condition and improve your mental health. Below are strategies to help you find moments of joy amidst the hustle and bustle this holiday season.

Strategies for supporting your mental health:

1. Pay attention to your feelings. Remember that it is okay to feel unhappy during the holidays. Recognizing your feelings is the first step to addressing and nurturing them.
2. Develop a plan for when you are feeling stressed, sad, or lonely. This plan may include calling a friend or family member, going for a walk, engaging in an activity that brings joy, or watching a favorite movie. Having a plan ahead of time can help ensure the difficult moments are more manageable.
3. Practice self-care. It is important to schedule time for yourself and activities that recharge your mind and body. This may include reading a good book, working out, spending time in nature, and practicing stress management skills, such as deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness. It is also important to remember to prioritize necessities, including eating a balanced diet, getting plenty of sleep, and finding time for exercise.
4. Connect with community. If you can't be near loved ones during the holidays, finding a supportive community through clubs, support groups, community centers, local meetups, and faith communities can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Consider scheduling a regular phone call with family and friends as well.

Full article found at https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/supporting-your-mental-health-during-holiday-season

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SPUSD

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In case of an Emergency:

- **911 For Immediate Support**
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Why Toxic Positivity Can Be Harmful

Toxic positivity is the belief that people should maintain a positive mindset no matter how dire or difficult a situation is. While there are benefits to being optimistic and engaging in positive thinking, toxic positivity rejects all difficult emotions in favor of a cheerful and often falsely positive façade.

Having a positive outlook on life is good for your mental well-being.1 The problem is that life isn't always positive. We all have painful emotions and experiences. While often unpleasant, those emotions need to be felt and dealt with openly and honestly to achieve acceptance and greater psychological health.2

Toxic positivity takes positive thinking to an overgeneralized extreme. This attitude doesn't just stress the importance of optimism—it also minimizes and even denies any trace of human emotions that are not strictly happy or positive.

Examples of Toxic Positivity

Toxic positivity can take a wide variety of forms. Some examples you may have encountered in your own life include:

- When something bad happens, such as losing your job, people may say to "just stay positive" or "look on the bright side." While such comments are often meant to be sympathetic, they can shut down anything the other person might want to say about what they are experiencing.
- After experiencing some type of loss, people might say that "everything happens for a reason." While people will make such statements because they believe they are comforting, this is also a way of avoiding the other person's pain.
- Upon expressing disappointment or sadness, someone may respond that "happiness is a choice." This suggests that if someone is feeling negative emotions, it's their own fault for not "choosing" to be happy.

Sometimes, these statements are well-intentioned or come from a good place, but are poorly worded. In other cases, people might not know what else to say and don't know how to be empathetic. Still, it is important to recognize that toxic positivity can be harmful.

Toxic Positivity vs. Optimism

It is possible to be optimistic in the face of difficult experiences and challenges. But people going through trauma don't need to be told to stay positive or feel that they are being judged for not maintaining a sunny outlook.

Why Toxic Positivity Is Harmful

Too much positivity is toxic because it can harm people who are going through difficult times. Rather than being able to share genuine human emotions and gain unconditional support, people who are faced with toxic positivity find their feelings dismissed, ignored, or outright invalidated.

- It's shaming: Receiving toxic positivity can lead to feelings of shame.3 It tells people that the emotions they are feeling are unacceptable. When someone is suffering, they need to know that their emotions are valid and that they can find relief and love in their friends and family.

Full article found at https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-toxic-positivity-5093958