

HOW TO COPE

With Loneliness as We Near the Holiday Season

As the holiday season approaches, the world seems to fill with laughter, festive decorations, and invitations to gatherings. But if you're feeling lonely, all that cheer can serve as a painful reminder of what feels missing in your life. Whether you've experienced a loss, are living far from loved ones, or are simply going through a period of disconnection, loneliness during the holidays can feel especially heavy. The good news? You're not alone—and there are meaningful ways to cope.

Here's how you can take care of your emotional well-being and navigate this time with more connection, comfort, and hope.

1. Acknowledge Your Feelings Without Judgment

The first and most important step is to let yourself feel what you feel. You don't have to "put on a happy face" just because it's the holiday season. Loneliness, sadness, grief, and even resentment are valid emotions—and suppressing them often makes them worse. Give yourself permission to be honest about your experience. Journaling, talking to a trusted friend, or simply saying aloud, "This time of year is hard for me," can begin to ease the pressure.

2. Resist the Urge to Isolate

When you're feeling lonely, the instinct to withdraw can be strong. But isolating yourself tends to deepen the loneliness. Instead, challenge yourself to stay connected in small, manageable ways. That could mean sending a message to a friend, attending a community event, or even chatting with your barista. These little moments of connection add up and can help you feel more rooted.

3. Create New Traditions That Reflect Where You Are Now

If past holidays were tied to people or routines that are no longer part of your life, it's okay to create new rituals. What matters is finding meaning in the present. Maybe you start a tradition of taking a solo nature walk with hot cocoa. Maybe you volunteer, light a candle for someone you miss, or cook your favorite meal just for yourself. Traditions don't have to be extravagant—they just need to feel good to you.

4. Give Back and Volunteer

One powerful way to shift the focus from loneliness is to give to others. Volunteering doesn't just help those in need—it can fill your own heart with purpose and connection. Whether you help at a food bank, donate gifts, or visit a local shelter, giving your time reminds you that you're part of something bigger.

5. Connect Online if In-Person Isn't Possible

Maybe you're physically distant from loved ones, or you're an introvert who finds socializing draining. Online communities, virtual events, or video calls can still bring a sense of togetherness. Don't underestimate the power of a group chat, a Zoom call with an old friend, or even engaging in a shared interest forum where people are simply talking and supporting each other.

6. Take a Break From Social Media

If scrolling through happy holiday photos leaves you feeling more alone, it's completely okay to take a break. What you see online is a highlight reel—not the full picture. Comparison is the thief of joy, and stepping away from digital spaces can help you reconnect with your reality, your needs, and your own moments of peace.

7. Practice Self-Compassion

Instead of criticizing yourself for feeling lonely or thinking, “I should be happy,” try speaking to yourself the way you’d speak to a dear friend. You’re not failing. You’re human. Try saying things like, “It makes sense that I feel this way,” or “I’m doing the best I can.” This gentle shift in self-talk can reduce emotional pain and help you cope more kindly.

8. Seek Professional Support If You Need It

If the weight of loneliness feels overwhelming or persistent, talking to a behavioral health specialist can make a huge difference. There’s no shame in needing support, especially around a time that stirs up so many emotions. Behavioral health specialists can help you process your feelings and develop practical tools to feel more supported and connected.

9. Stay Grounded in the Present

It’s easy to get caught up in memories of “how things used to be” or to worry about being alone forever. Try bringing your focus gently back to the present. What can you do right now that feels soothing? Is it listening to your favorite music, watching a cozy movie, taking a bath, or baking something simple? Small, mindful acts can help you feel more grounded and cared for.

10. Remember: This Season Doesn’t Define You

Feeling lonely right now doesn’t mean you’ll always feel this way. Life is constantly shifting. New connections, opportunities, and joys can still be ahead. For now, be gentle with yourself, do what feels manageable, and remind yourself that it’s okay to feel lonely—and it’s also okay to hope for more.

The holidays can be complicated, but you’re not alone in your feelings. By showing yourself kindness, reaching out in small ways, and creating your own sense of meaning, you can find light in unexpected places—even during the loneliest of seasons.