



## **Coping with the Holiday Blues**

The Holidays are upon us and for many people that means counting our blessings, eating favorite foods, spending time with family and friends, gifting and perhaps even reflecting on our lives. Partying and consumer madness aside, there can be a profound sense of gratitude that comes from counting one's blessings. This is a time of year when the depths of our relationships are measured and celebrated.

However, this is also a time of year that can be very stressful for a variety of reasons. Unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others, thoughts of not measuring up, and family estrangement can turn the season of joy into a season of sadness and anxiety. Despite media portrayal of the Beaver Cleaver family as the norm, many families are dysfunctional, and the holidays can be a nightmare rather than a blissful time of celebration. For LGBT people there's the stress around family acceptance of sexual orientation or gender identity. Those who participate in family gatherings for the holidays feel the added pressure of either hiding a part of who they are, or fighting to gain equal recognition for their partner. Those who are estranged from family feel the sadness associated with rejection. And for those who are "orphaned" and bereft of family, the loneliness is even more acute.

LGBT seniors often find the holidays difficult because the emphasis is so much on family, and many of us don't have family. Parents have died, and if we didn't have children, there is no younger generation to embrace us at this time of year. Siblings, nieces and nephews may be geographically far away, and there are no grandchildren to fuss over. Historically, LGBT people have formed chosen families, "logical kin" consisting of friends, to make up for this void in their lives, but during the holidays, it's hard not to feel the loss of family support, especially when it seems like everyone around you is immersed in family.

In order to make the holidays a time of joy rather than of sadness or stress, it's important to plan in advance what you want to do to celebrate the season, and to thoughtfully decide what's realistic, within your budget, and "stress-free". Developing a plan ahead of time gives you something to look forward to and ensures that you are setting goals for yourself that are manageable and realistic. When feelings of inadequacy, overwhelm, loneliness or sadness surface, it's important to talk with someone about those feelings. Often, the best person to talk to is a therapist - someone professionally trained, and empathic.

The LGBT Community Center of the Desert has a mental health clinic where we see clients of any age on a sliding scale, regardless of ability to pay or insurance. We also have a no cost counseling program for age 60+ adults that help people deal with the symptoms of isolation and apathy, low energy, and lack of motivation often associated with mild depression.

So, whether it's sadness, the stress of the holidays or any other problem, we are here to help.

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