

# Christmas and Depression: A Guide to a Happy Holiday Season

“Don’t let the life thief take control of the season of love.”

By Faust Ruggiero, M.S.

The holidays have arrived, along with all the good cheer, Christmas shopping, and that fast pace which is the hallmark of the holiday season. For some people, it is a much anticipated time of the year. They gear up, engaging themselves in the emotional holiday extravaganza. For others, however, the holidays can take on an entirely different meaning. For these people, the holidays mean becoming overwhelmed, anticipating the worst, and the dark dismal emotional wasteland hosted by depression, your not so friendly holiday life thief.

For those suffering from depression, the holidays do little more than exacerbate an already difficult way of life. Holiday depression flips the switch engaging the holiday life thief, pushing people into a dark and emotionless void. For people suffering with depression it's not about making your bed, it's about getting out of the bed. It's not about what to do today, it's about doing anything. It's not about seeing holiday guests, it's about avoiding the holiday season altogether. Depression turns out the glimmering lights that illuminate the holiday season.

## **The Setup**

It's not only the arrival of the holidays that trigger holiday depression, it's the anticipation of the pain and suffering that holiday depression ignites. In the mind of a depressed person, the only thing to do is to prepare for one of the worst seasons of the year. Depression's mindset not only robs those suffering from it of the beauty of the holiday season, it instills in the mind, the emotions, and even the body the need to prepare for a time that connects back to past trauma and pain, and memories of ruined family events, abuse, broken promises, and emotional despair. The depressed person is thoroughly convinced that the season will be horrible, and they are worthy of nothing else.

## **The Language**

The holiday language for a depressed person is negative, and pessimistic, and can progress to the point of self-loathing and unworthiness. There is often a firm belief that the person does not belong in a happy world, and their inability to feel good during a season that is defined by love, peace, and connectivity seems to justify the horrible person they have come to believe they are. For depressed people, the

language they use internally not only describes what they are feeling, it can define what they firmly believe about who they are and what their life is all about. The language they are using can range from simply defining the emptiness they are feeling, or it can bring them to the brink of desperate actions.

## **The Retreat**

Even without the push from the holiday season, depression creates an aloneness that moves people away from each other, causing them to isolate and avoid contact with family and friends. It becomes so difficult for a depressed person to be in the presence of others who have waited for the holiday season, define it as the best time of the year, and are fully immersed in the joy, love, and peace that the season brings. Feeling so disconnected with the festivities, the easiest approach seems to be to retreat, isolate, and avoid the pain associated with what should be a wonderful seasonal event. They are now alone, in the clutches of a depressed, dark world.

## **How To Help A Depressed Person**

### **Be A Support Person**

Supporting a depressed person through the holidays can be the difference between life or death for that person. All too often, we become so distracted by the glitter and excitement of the holidays that we either missed the signals of the person is displaying, or we really don't want to get involved, since it can become a negative detractor to the most joyous time of our year.

There are two simple rules that can help a depressed person cope with the adverse effects they are feeling from the holidays. First, simply spend time with them and talk with them. Let them know that they are not forgotten. Second, validate their feelings, and try to help them be part of the holiday program. Their initial refusal does not mean they don't want to be with you. It only means that they're struggling. Help them take little steps. Let them know that they are loved and that you really feel that your holidays would be better if they were part of them. Let them know that they're important.

If through your discussions with them you feel as though there is cause for concern, it's important to get them the help they need. The holidays can be the most difficult time for a depressed person, and they may resist your invitations. The depression can become far more severe during this time, so if you have concerns

that they may harm themselves, it makes good sense to enlist the help of professionals who understand what to do with holiday depression.

### **The Professionals**

Often, depressed people have professionals whom they are already involved with. If this is the case, it's a good idea to contact them. If these people are not already established, getting the person to a primary care physician can be beneficial. If one is not available, an emergency room may be necessary. Check to see if any medications have been prescribed to address the depression, and try to determine if they are taking them as prescribed.

Suicides related to depression increases during the holidays, so watch for some of the warning signs. If they are talking about wanting to die, being a burden to others, having no reason to live, or say their pain is unbearable, enlist the assistance of others to help you decide what you need to do. It's always better to error on the side of caution, so don't hesitate to get the professionals involved.

### **A Simple Holiday Plan**

Signals depressed people can give, especially during the holidays, can be difficult to understand. They seem to be pushing you away, but what they really need is to keep you close. Try not to assume that the depressed person does not want you close. They may say that, but it is a depression that is instigating this behavior. Be willing to stay close, and here are some of the more important ways that you can help a depressed person through the holidays.

1. Spend time with them. Validate what they are feeling and that you are willing to spend time with them. Don't make this look like a chore. They'll see through that. Make sure they understand that they are important, and that you want to be with them.
2. Try to include them in some of the festivities. Make those events very simple, and break them down into very small components. For example, they may help you with online shopping, or wrapping presents. Just get them involved.
3. Try to help them attend some of the family or social functions. Again, make these very simple. They should also be of short duration, and with an exit plan should the person need a break from the festivities.
4. This one is very important. Let them know that you do understand that it is the depression that is causing the problems, and help them understand that

this is not who they are, it is simply a condition they have. Let them know that you are willing to help them in any way you can. Be honest with them and get the proverbial elephant out of the room.

5. Check back often. You don't have to be secretive about your motivations. Let them know that you understand *some* of what the depression does, and that you are unwilling to leave them alone. They are important to you, they are going through a difficult time, and you are willing to share some of that with them.
6. It also makes sense to be proactive. Know what you are going to do in the event that things take a desperate turn. Should the depressed person beginning to initiate desperate actions, it is important to be ready by knowing what to do if and when that happens.

Nothing about depression is easy, but treating it is not impossible. The emotional attachment you can offer during the holidays is the antithesis of the isolation and aloneness the depressed person is living with. All too often, in hindsight, after a depressed person has taken their lives, we look back and say there are some things we could have done. Try to follow steps one through six, and be there for someone who can benefit from your holiday help. Keep in mind that the person you are dealing with is a beautiful loving person who has an affliction that attacks them physically, intellectually, emotionally, and even spiritually. Treat them like that beautiful person. Merry Christmas, and love to all!

Faust Ruggiero is the award-winning author of The Fix Yourself Empowerment Series, *The Fix Yourself Handbook*, *The Fix Your Anxiety Handbook*, and the new *The Fix Your Depression Handbook*. <https://www.fastruggiero.com/>

The Plan

The Network