

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

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Beating the **holiday blues**

It's here again—that time of the year when movies, TV and magazines focus on images of holiday cheer. Holiday icons are everywhere and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” fills the air. Healthy, happy, cheerful families are depicted sitting around a mahogany table laden with holiday fare.

But it can be pretty depressing if your reality falls short of the expectations set by such media images. Maybe your family has suffered a loss through divorce or death. Maybe a loved one is ill or in a distant city. Maybe there's not enough money to buy the kinds of gifts and holiday trimmings you hoped for. Maybe you're not on speaking terms with certain family members or maybe you're under so much stress that holiday obligations only add more pressure to your life. Maybe you're alone and lonely.

Of course, holidays can be wonderful. But often, they're not all they're cracked up



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to be. That's when the holiday blues can kick in. Most of us know the signs: a blah feeling, difficulty getting involved in the holiday spirit, irritability, sadness, even depression.

Fortunately there are some things you can do:

- **Plan your time carefully.** Plan your visit with your family so you don't fall back into your childhood role. Take your parents out to dinner, spend time with them individually and plan activities for yourself away from your parents.
- **Have realistic expectations.** When families have reunions, tensions appear. Expect this and try not to let any problems get you down. You can't fix everybody!
- **Practice creative gift-giving.** If money is tight, consider setting a limit on the amount spent on gifts within your circle of friends and family. Try making gifts or give the gift of your time in the form of a useful service like babysitting or dog walking. In large groups, each person can be assigned one person to buy a

gift for, drastically cutting down on the amount of money that needs to be spent.

- **Be kind to yourself.** Expect to miss loved ones during this time and allow yourself time to reflect. Remember to count your blessings, too!
- **Reach out.** If the holiday blues are severe or hard to take, seek professional help. Your Employee Assistance Program can provide free, confidential holiday stress management or help with any personal matter.

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