**Finding Joy During Darkness  
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According to Hallmark channel movies, the holidays are absolute joy for everyone, even the Grinch. Sure, there’s a few moments of anxiety sprinkled in (mainly to see if the mail service will deliver the gift we ordered on time of if Johnny will make it home for Christmas) but overall, it seems like everyone paints this time as one of joy and delight.

Not to be a cotton-headed ninny muggings (to quote the movie *Elf*), but that’s just not a realistic expectation for everyone.

The period that is described as the “holidays” spans over five weeks, from American Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day. That’s one tenth of the calendar year. In that time frame, people don’t stop being diagnosed with serious illnesses, people don’t stop grieving the loss of a loved one, depression doesn’t just magically go away, and not everyone has a family to visit. The real world still operates “business as usual” with the addition of all the other responsibilities this time of year brings.

What are you supposed to do with the challenges you’re facing when the world wants you to be full of cheer? I wish I had the answer. I know from personal experience it’s not easy to get out of bed most days with a chronic health condition that causes pain, and even harder when the days are so short and you feel like you slept 5 minutes. I also know that it’s hard to be around people (even ones you love) when you’re just not in the party mood because of anxiety.

If you find yourself joyless amidst darkness this season, you’re not alone. If you can, find the courage to give these ideas a try and find joy (albeit smaller joy) in your current space:

**Write down something you’re looking forward to every day.** It doesn’t have to be anything grand – maybe it’s watching a new episode of a show you’re enjoying or driving around to look at holiday lights. It can even be something small like enjoying a hot cup of coffee with breakfast, just try to find something.

**Explore an old tradition that you miss.** The holidays are full of traditions and with the passing of time recreating everything isn’t feasible, but this is where you can get creative. Lean into an activity like attending a religious service that is meaningful to you either in-person or online. If the sounds of the season help make your spirits bright, create a holiday playlist and let the nostalgia wash over you.

**Scale Back.** You can still enjoy the things that bring you joy, just in a simpler way. Instead of going to a big party where you’ll feel overwhelmed, consider inviting one or two close friends to share a meal and holiday cheer. Just because you have 50 boxes of holiday decorations, doesn’t mean that you’ll feel good enough to tough it out and put them all out. Listen to your body and put up the essentials.

**Put your circumstances into perspective.** If you don’t have family closer or weren’t invited to a formal gathering, consider volunteering at a local soup-kitchen and be in community with those grateful to you for providing them a hot meal. If you’re feeling lonely, reach out to an organization that resonates with you needing some extra holiday hands.

**Say “no” to things that steal your joy.** It can be challenging to add things to an already busy time that can bring you bits of joy, but for some of us the challenge is in saying “no” to the things that take it away. Especially when we’re not feeling your best. This is your reminder that it’s okay to prioritize yourself. The people who you’re saying “no” to likely care about you and will ALWAYS want what’s best for you. You’re simply not responsible for others’ happiness at your own expense.

Every day is a fresh chance to start looking for joy in something small. With the addition of daily resilience building exercises provided by cōpe, your ability to find those small things will grow with time. In the meantime, brainstorm all the things that could possibly bring you joy so that when you’re ready you’ll have a joy-full life.