

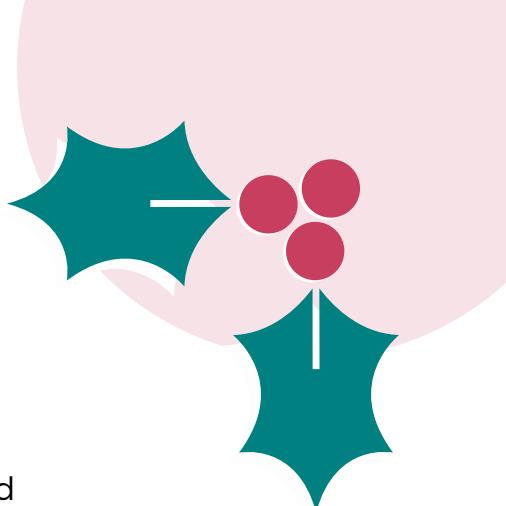
Coping with Loneliness and Grief

During the Holidays

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How to Cope with Loneliness and Grief this Holiday Season

Sharon Martin, LCSW



This holiday season many of us will experience loneliness and loss. And, although we usually associate grief with death, we grieve many other types of loss as well.

Some of the reasons people feel alone during the holidays include:

- You've experienced a break-up or divorce.
 - You moved to a new community.
 - You're estranged from or not talking to your family.
 - You don't feel connected to or accepted by the people you are with.
 - A loved one is not himself due to mental illness or substance abuse
 - A loved one is in jail, rehab, or the hospital.
 - You had to set a boundary and can no longer spend the holidays with your family (or friends).
 - A loved one has died (this includes pets).
 - You're single and longing for a relationship.
 - Your loved one is serving in the military and/or is away from home.
 - Your children are away at college or at your ex's.
 - You placed a child for adoption or are unable to parent your child.
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Often, being alone isn't your choice. Not everyone has family, some can't afford to travel to visit family, and some have lost loved ones in varying ways.

Others choose not to be around their families due to repeated abuse and conflict. Even when you are the one who has chosen not to be with family, it can still hurt. Your loss is still real.

And there are other times when we're with family or friends, but still feel lonely.

TIPS FOR COPING

Acknowledge your loss.

Allow yourself to be sad and grieve. Process your feelings through talking, writing, or creative outlets. You don't have to pretend to be happy all the time. It's important to be true to your feelings; make time to cry, go to therapy, and just be sad, if needed.



Adjust your expectations.

Loneliness is particularly difficult during the holiday season because we expect to be at family dinners, parties with friends, or New Year's Eve celebrations with our sweethearts. And memories, both good and bad, of past holidays, also influence our expectations. You may find yourself longing for the happy holidays of the past or angry and sad that the special holidays you'd hoped to be having this year aren't a reality. But expectations often leave us disappointed. So, even though it can be sad to let go of your expectations – the way you want the holidays to be – it's more helpful to try to accept what is and make the most of it.

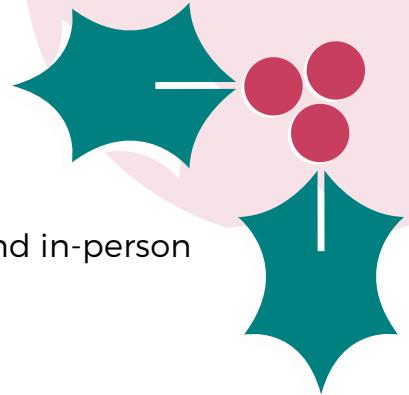
Don't wallow in it.

There's a difference between honoring your feelings and self-pity. As I said, you should allow yourself time and space to feel sad, angry, and any other feelings you're having. However, you also need to try to do things that will help you feel better. Sometimes, this includes doing things that you don't feel like doing, but that you know are good for you -- like taking a short walk or having something to eat. Remember the basics of self-care: get enough sleep (but don't stay in bed all day), take a shower and get dressed, eat healthfully, don't overindulge in alcohol, exercise, and spend time outside in the sunlight.

Connect with others.

Embarrassment, fear of judgment, or depression may keep you from connecting with others when you need it most. But, I assure you that you aren't the only one feeling lonely or grieving and there are people who genuinely want to help and connect. But, remember, people can't read your mind or intuitively know what you need; you have to ask. So, try to reach out for support and also accept invitations and offers of help.





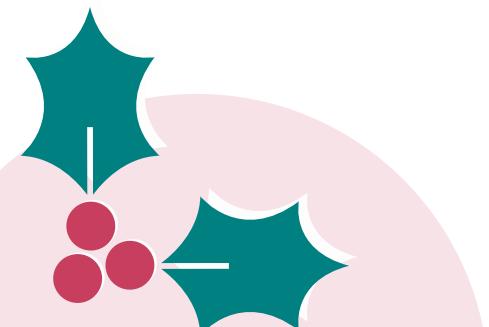
You can look for connection through:

- a support group or 12-step meeting (there are online and in-person options)
- a religious community
- volunteering
- seeing a therapist
- friends (perhaps you have old friends you've lost touch with or acquaintances that you'd like to get to know better)
- neighbors (try striking up a conversation when you see them outside or collect used coats from your neighbors to donate or organize a holiday decorating contest)

Do what you love.

You can improve your mood by doing something that brings you joy. Think about your hobbies or interests. Is there something you used to enjoy doing, but haven't done in a while? Or maybe there's something new that you've wanted to try. It doesn't have to be anything complicated or radical; often simple pleasures are the best way to add some enjoyment to your life. If finding joy is a big struggle, start by engaging in something enjoyable (or something that used to be enjoyable) for fifteen minutes and increase from there.

I hope you'll try some of these suggestions and can start to build connections that decrease your loneliness this holiday season.



7 WAYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF DURING THE HOLIDAYS



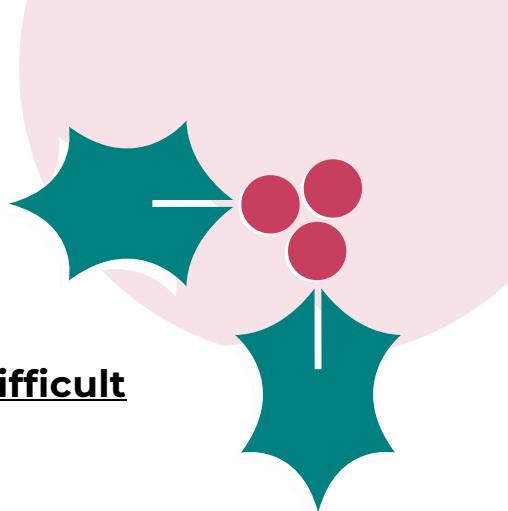
- **Enjoy your holiday failures, imperfections, and everything that doesn't go according to plan.** No matter how hard you try, the holidays never go exactly the way you want them to. It can be challenging to stay flexible, but the rewards are great when you can adapt to last-minute changes and even laugh at yourself. The holidays don't have to be perfect to be fun, meaningful, and memorable. In fact, sometimes "failures" make the best memories.
- **Practice saying "No".** The holidays are filled with extra obligations – party invitations, family gatherings, buying gifts, cooking, and on and on. However, you can't do it all and you needn't feel like you have to! Boundaries help you protect your time and energy so it's spent on what's most important to you. You can give yourself permission to do the things that you enjoy and say "no" to things you don't want to do.
- **Remember self-care.** It's wonderful to spend the holiday season giving and doing for others, but not at the expense of your own health and wellbeing. Try to schedule time for things that restore you emotionally, physically and spiritually. Perhaps that's meditation, exercise, playing the guitar, or talking to your therapist.
- **Surround yourself with positive people.** Limiting time with "energy vampires" who drain your energy and leave you feeling exhausted and irritated can help minimize holiday stress. Also, be sure to seek out and make plans with positive people. You can create a "family" of your own choosing by gathering with friends, neighbors, your faith community, or anyone who "fills you up" emotionally.



7 WAYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

- **Set realistic expectations.** Unfortunately, expectations are often a set-up for disappointment. Creating realistic expectations can help you plan for challenges. Ask yourself: “Given the reality of the situation, what are my options? How can I make this situation manageable for myself? What can I do if it becomes unmanageable?”
- **Savor the good times.** Often the holiday season is a mixed bag; some of it’s fun and fulfilling and some of it’s stressful. Try not to let the problems overshadow the good times. Focus on being fully present and savoring every moment and detail of the events and people that make you happy.
- **Take a real break.** No matter if you’ve got one day or two weeks off from work during the holidays, it’s easy to pack it full of travel, parties, and holiday to-do’s. And while many of these things are enjoyable, they can also be draining. So, be sure you’ve set aside time to rest and relax.



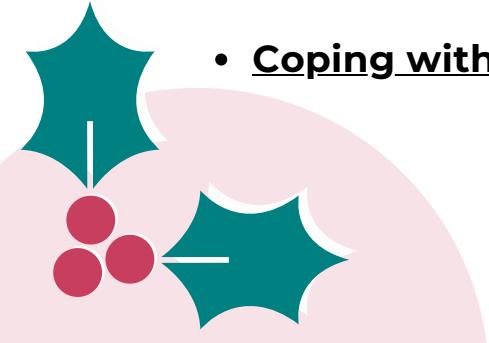


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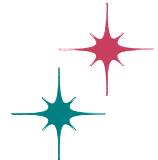
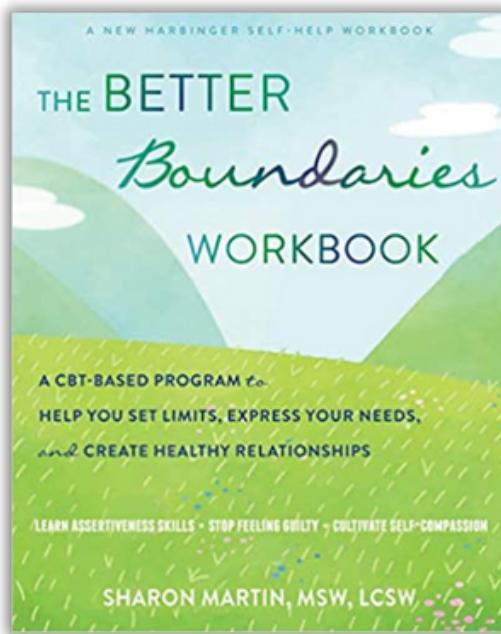




Dr. Sharon Martin

Hi, I'm Sharon Martin, a psychotherapist, author, and relationship expert in San Jose, CA. I believe boundaries are an essential component of self-care and I'm passionate about spreading the word that boundaries aren't selfish and there's no need to feel guilty about taking care of yourself! I'm the author of [The Better Boundaries Guided Journal](#), [The CBT Workbook for Perfectionism](#), and [Cutting Ties with Your Parents](#). You can also find dozens of free articles and resources on my website: [LiveWellwithSharonMartin.com](#).

LEARN HOW TO SET BETTER BOUNDARIES



I know from personal and professional experience that healthy boundaries can transform your life. If you struggle to stand up for yourself, ask for what you need, or feel guilty or afraid when you do, learning to set better boundaries can increase your self-esteem and confidence, and help you create respectful, satisfying relationships. As you know, setting boundaries is tough--that's why I wrote *The Better Boundaries Workbook*. With it, you can learn to set effective boundaries!

The Better Boundaries Workbook is available from [Amazon](#) and all major book retailers.