Announcer (00:00:03)

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Adair Seifert (00:00:09)

The holiday season is often portrayed as a time of joy, love and togetherness. However, for some, it can bring about a different set of emotions.

As we approach the holidays, it's important to recognize that the season can present challenges and trigger what's commonly known as “holiday blues.”

I'm Adair Seifert, and today, Tammy Dixon, assistant director of the counseling center at Missouri State University, offers insight into navigating difficult emotions during the holiday season.

Tammy Dixon (00:00:39)

Some of the reasons that individuals might experience holiday blues are the social demands. There are a lot of gatherings and family gatherings. Honestly, not everyone has great family relationships, so it can cause more stress.

Biological stressors such as sleep and alcohol use are prevalent during that time of year as well. There are a lot of unmet expectations. You know our family may have expectations that you attend all of these different family dinners. But figuring out what's right for you is important.

There are movies and past traditions that put expectations on us that don't absolutely have to be there. The pandemic has changed a lot of how we gather as family and friends. I think that also causes a lot of holiday blues at times. For example, If someone can't be there because they're not feeling well or someone's in quarantine.

Traumatic family histories can definitely play a part in holiday blues.

Then the overspending that occurs during that time can cause financial stress.

Adair Seifert (00:01:39)

She explains healthy ways to navigate holiday blues.

Tammy Dixon (00:01:42)

I think people can navigate challenging feelings just by first setting realistic expectations.

I mean, the movies and society tell us how the holidays should look. So, if we develop our own expectations for the holidays, they can be a little easier.

For instance, if I'm an introvert, I probably don't want to schedule five parties in one week, right? I want to preserve my energy a little bit.

You can also take care of yourself by making sure you're eating well, sleeping well, exercisingand kind of keeping to the structure that you normally do.

I think a lot of people are in the same boat when it comes to these feelings, but we don't tell each other that. By talking and getting validation for our feelings can be very helpful as well.

Acknowledging feelings like grief is an emotion that you're going through during the holidays to talk about your lost loved one or the changes in your traditions that are bringing that loss and grief.

Then as always, keeping an attitude of gratitude, finding, looking at the things that we are grateful for and focusing on the positive can be helpful.

Overall, just don't aim for perfection, especially during this time of year.

Adair Seifert (00:02:56)

Some people can have holiday blues follow them into the post-holiday season. Dixon explains how to process those emotions.

Tammy Dixon (00:03:04)

Kind of the same as I just spoke about. You can navigate that post holiday blues or that downtime by recognizing those feelings and allowing yourself to have those feelings.

I think we beat ourselves up for feeling that way after we've just had a really great holiday season and now we're feeling blue, but just setting those reasonable expectations or even recognizing, “hey, it's OK if I spend the evening on the couch.”

I do think if the blues continue for a few weeks after the holidays, then it may be something more than just the holiday blues. I would encourage someone to watch those emotions and seek professional help or talk to loved ones about those feelings.

Recognize that seeking mental health is a strength. I know that there's been some stigma about doing so, but it actually it’s a strength.

I know a lot of my friends get recommendations from their other friends about who they've gone to for professional help. If you do go in and you don't click with the clinician, I would always encourage you to ask for another clinician or to try a different one. Research shows that the relationship between a client and the counselor is the best predictor of success, so if you're not clicking, try a new one.

Adair Seifert (00:04:21)

That was Tammy Dixon, assistant director of the counseling center at Missouri State University.

I'm Adair Seifert for the Missouri State Journal.

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For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397, the Missouri State Journal is available online@ksu.org.