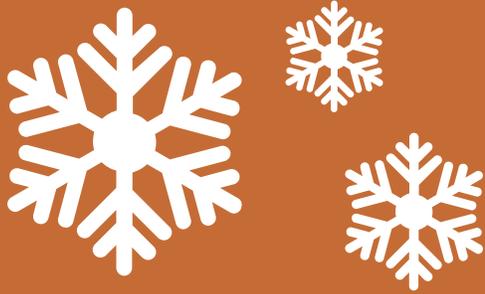


# Ulliance

Enhancing **People**. Improving Business.



## The Ultimate Guide to Bust Holiday Blues & Stress

*Tips & Tricks + Resources to Get  
Through the Holiday Season & Beyond!*

Written by: Ulliance Inc.

# Are the Holiday Blues a Thing? Yes!

The holiday season has begun. The weather is changing, commercials promoting holiday deals have begun to take control of the airwaves, and families are preparing for their annual gatherings. Every year, people set high expectations for the holidays. Unfortunately, most of these expectations are never reached. This factor alone is one of the primary contributors to the phenomenon called **holiday-induced depression—AKA the holiday blues**. **Holiday-induced depression** can impact multiple facets of a person's life, including their relationships with family members and even their employers. It can also affect how they view themselves and basic functions including their performance at work.

*Holiday-induced depression shares its symptoms with major depression, except that it rears its ugly head during the holiday season. Some of the symptoms include, feelings of hopelessness or anger, losing interest in pleasurable activities, changes in appetite, trouble sleeping, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating, withdrawal and even thoughts of suicide.*

## Factors that can Contribute to Holiday Blues/Depression

*For some of us, the holidays can be a depressing time when we get the holiday blues. Feelings of sadness, loneliness, and anger can intensify when contrasted with the joy expected of the holidays. Factors that can contribute to holiday depression include:*



### Did You Know?

*About 12% of workers have been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives?*

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# Factors that can Contribute to Holiday Depression

*For some of us, the holidays can be a depressing time when we get the holiday blues. Feelings of sadness, loneliness, and anger can intensify when contrasted with the joy expected of the holidays. Factors that can contribute to holiday depression include:*

- Associating the holidays with unresolved family issues or a painful childhood
- Ignoring feelings of sadness, loneliness, or depression in an effort to maintain "holiday cheer"
- Facing the loss of a loved one with whom you have shared the holidays
- Having unrealistic expectations of family and friends
- Having an expectation that you "should" feel good
- Being away from family and friends
- Feeling isolated from others
- Reflecting on losses or disappointments over the past year
- Coping with changes in family obligations, particularly after a recent marriage or divorce
- Drinking more alcohol, which is often more readily available during the holidays

*(Avoid drinking alcohol to ward off negative feelings. Alcohol often will make depression worse.)*

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*There is a lack of understanding that depression can be physiological as well as psychological. Putting on a happy face and just “snapping out of it” is not a solution for those that truly suffer from depression.*



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# How to Cope with the Holiday Blues

- Try something new. Take a vacation with a family member or friend.
- Spend time with people who care about you.
- Volunteer your time to help others. Spending time with those in need can help you feel less isolated.
- If you are religious, take time to reflect on the spiritual significance of the holidays.
- Try to appreciate the good things you have now instead of focusing on the past.
- Stay active. Get out. Go for a walk. Window shop.
- Expect feelings of sadness or loneliness. These are normal emotions, but they can be managed.
- Get help if you need it. Don't be embarrassed to ask for help any time of the year.



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# How to Prevent Holiday Stress

Are your expectations for the holidays realistic? Asking yourself this question is the first step to managing holiday stress. Make a list of what you expect from yourself and your family during the holidays. Hidden within these expectations you might find your potential holiday stressors - the things specific to you that can cause stress.

Under each item in the list, write down what changes you can make to prevent or defuse stress. Make the changes that will be most helpful to you. Do not hold on to unrealistic goals, such as creating the most enchanting holiday atmosphere. Remember to include your own needs.

Here is an *example* of a holiday stress prevention list:



## Holiday shopping

- Ask people what they want instead of scouring the earth to find the "perfect" gifts.
- Shop early, when there is more of a selection.
- Plan a budget and stick with it.

## Planning family get-togethers

- Buy prepared foods, instead of cooking everything from scratch.
- Ask others to bring their favorite dishes.
- Cook and freeze foods ahead of time.

## Scheduling time with family and friends

- Simplify holiday commitments and traditions. Discuss with your family which traditions are most important to you and to them. It's okay to re-evaluate past traditions.
- Allow time for yourself. Remember to do things that you enjoy.
- Avoid time crunches by making plans to visit some friends and family soon after the holidays.
- Don't over-schedule yourself. Allow enough time to relax and recover after visiting with others.
- Tell family members about your commitments so you are not struggling against their expectations.
- Travel after rush hour. When driving long distances, give yourself time to stop and rest.

## Pausing before the holiday spread

- Avoid overeating and overdrinking, especially alcoholic beverages.
- Avoid starving yourself in anticipation of eating at holiday parties. This approach can lead to eating too much of the wrong foods.
- Continue to exercise and watch your diet.

## Managing your time

- Set priorities and let go of impossible goals.
- Stop to enjoy the fruits of your labor.
- Don't spend all of your time planning activities for your family. You might end up feeling drained and unappreciated.
- Take the time you need to finish tasks that are important to you. Don't try to complete everything at once.
- Ask others, including the kids, to help you complete chores.
- Rest when your body tells you to.



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# How to Prevent Holiday Stress – for the Blended Family

Holidays can be joyful. They can also be very challenging. When you add the complexities of a blended family, you are adding differing ideas and conflicting schedules into an already hectic holiday.

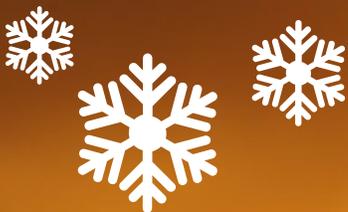
Remember that in blended families often losses have been experienced in the recent past, and, because the holidays are a time of remembering, they can be a time when emotions run high. Adults and children can find themselves sad, easily disappointed or pessimistic because they expect the holidays to be difficult. “Expect the unexpected” is always a rule of thumb in stepfamilies, and even more so at holidays.

On the other hand, this can also be a time to create new memories by keeping your goals simple and focusing on what is really important. Anticipate and plan for the upcoming holidays with your blended family in mind. Minimizing holiday stress can be one of the greatest gifts we give our families and ourselves. The memory of peace far surpasses the gifts we can buy.

## Following are a few suggestions to help decrease holiday stress:

1. Remember that you are not “The Brady Bunch”.
2. Plan. Talk with the children’s other biological parents and extended families. Include everyone who is involved in your children’s life. Set up an agenda for the kids so they know what to expect.
3. Be flexible: Have a meeting with all the children and make a plan, using old traditions and incorporating new ones into your holidays. If the kids have a say in this, they will feel more part of the family.
4. Strive for equity in gift-giving for all the children, stepchildren and biological children alike.
5. Avoid over-commitment: Avoid too many activities in short periods of time.
6. If there are old, hostile feelings towards an ex-partner, put them aside. You and your ex should show adult behavior and demonstrate respect for each other. This will give your children the relief they deserve.
7. Encourage expression of feelings: If your child or stepchild does not see the other parent, allow him or her to share feelings of sadness, hurt, and anger.
8. Pay attention to small details: Make sure when signing cards that you include everyone’s names. Make sure kids have someone to help them with their shopping.
9. Do not compete over gifts.

*Take care of yourself and your relationship with your spouse. If all of this seems to be too much and is overwhelming—this is normal. The key to making this an enjoyable holiday is to make sure that all are a part of it, and nurture yourself so you have the energy for all the challenges ahead.*



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# Emotional Health Resources – For depression, anxiety & stress

**Ulliance** is part of your benefit package through your employer, providing free and confidential support for common concerns such as depression, anxiety, grief and loss, stress management, and work-life balance. Services include:

- **Counseling** with a licensed professional
- **Coaching** for help achieving a personal goal, such as stress and time management
- **Community Resources** specific to you and your family's needs such as local support groups, child and eldercare or domestic violence
- **Crisis support** (24/7 availability)
- **LifeAdvisor Well-Being Portal** ([www.lifeadvisor.com](http://www.lifeadvisor.com)) The Ulliance portal offers:
  - **A comprehensive library** of articles and videos on topics related to five areas of wellbeing (Emotional, Physical, Financial, Career and Community).
  - **Self-Assessments** for stress, anxiety, and depression
  - **An on-demand library of webinars** on topics such as resiliency, improving your mood, parenting, and stress management.

Call 800-448-8326  
[LifeAdvisor.com](http://LifeAdvisor.com)

## National Organizations Offering Education and Resources

**Centers for Disease Control (CDC):** [How Right Now | Finding What Helps \(cdc.gov\)](#)

This site provides education and resources on a variety of emotional health topics, including depression, anxiety, and stress. How Right Now is a campaign that helps the user identify how they're feeling, and provides appropriate information and resources depending on the answer.

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** [Home | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

NAMI is a grassroots organization devoted to improving the lives of those affected by mental illness. Through various programs, it aims to change public perception about mental illness, help manage mental illness, and build up family relationships. Reach the help line at 800-950-NAMI (800-950-6264) or text "NAMI" to 741741.

**Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA):** [Anxiety Disorders and Depression Research & Treatment | Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA](#) The ADAA works to improve the quality of life of those affected by anxiety and depression and related disorders. This nonprofit's programs provide education, resources, and support.

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**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):** [SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP \(4357\) | SAMHSA](#) Provides a 24/7 resource line for substance use and mental health treatment options.

**HelpGuide:** [HelpGuide.org](#) HelpGuide is an online resource designed to educate people on mental health and help people better understand how they can support their mental health. If you're feeling [stressed](#), listen to one of its relaxing [guided meditations](#).

## Resources for Diverse Populations

**SAFE Project:** [Resources for Diverse Populations - SAFE Project](#)

## LGBTQ+ Specific

**The Trevor Project:** [The Trevor Project | For Young LGBTQ Lives](#) This national organization focuses on suicide prevention among young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Reach its crisis help line by calling 866-488-7386 or texting START to 678-678.

**It Gets Better Project:** [It Gets Better – The It Gets Better Project exists to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ youth around the globe.](#) This nonprofit organization supports, empowers, and connects LGBTQ+ people from all over the world. [Read](#) or [watch](#) stories told by LGBTQ+ people, or [share your own](#).

## Suicide Prevention Hotlines

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** [Lifeline \(suicidepreventionlifeline.org\)](#)  
Chat online or call 1-800-273-8255

**Suicide.org:** [Michigan Suicide Hotlines - Suicide.org! Michigan Suicide Hotlines](#)

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## Smart Phone Apps: Track Your Mood, Meditate and Relax

- **YouTube-** has a wide variety of guided meditations for free. Just type your preference in the search bar (i.e., Guided meditation for depression, or guided meditation for sleep)
- **Calm-** helps you to reduce stress, improve sleep and improve focus
- **Insight Timer-** an app available for download on all smart phones. The free version has thousands of different meditations on a variety of topics (depression, anxiety, stress relief, sleep, etc.). There are also relaxing sounds, such as rain, thunderstorms, or ocean waves if you would prefer to just have relaxing background noise.
- **Breathe2Relax-** Smartphone app with instructions and exercises in diaphragmatic breathing, a documented stress-management skill. Includes detailed information on the effects of stress on the body.
- **Chopra Meditation & Well-Being-** Created by Deepak Chopra, this app helps you manage stress with meditation, self-care tools and tips for your mind, body and soul.
- **Happify-** A brain-training app based on research showing that some types of activity can help you combat negativity, anxiety and stress while fostering positive traits like gratitude and empathy.
- **Headspace-** "A gym membership for the mind," Headspace provides a series of guided meditation sessions and mindfulness training. A free trial is available with additional sessions available by subscription.
- **Personal Zen-** Developed with a professor of psychology and neurosciences, a series of games based on clinical findings about methods for reducing anxiety
- **Breeze-** Mood Tracker- Knowledge is power. Once you become more aware of what you're feeling when, you can begin figuring out links between life events and cycles and your moods, which in turn will help you manage (and work around) your moods.
- **The Mindfulness App-** Choose from five guided meditations, with options for listening to calming music or nature sounds.

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