



# PEACE IN THE SEASON

Protecting Your Mental Wellness During the Holidays

A Mental Health Guide

**Silence  
the ~~Shame~~**

Silence the Shame, Inc. is dedicated to revolutionizing mental health in high stress communities. Our holistic approach addresses the root causes of mental health stigma, reduces suicide rates, and improves overall health outcomes. We believe in treating mental health as a spectrum, focusing on wellness, prevention, and recovery in addition to illness. By recognizing the connection between mental and physical well-being, we strive to increase pathways to care and advocate for better environmental conditions. Through innovative programs promoting health literacy, mental health and suicide prevention, positive youth development, and self-care, we are creating a culture of support and healing. Join us in our mission to transform mental health care and make a lasting impact on high stress communities.

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## WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)?

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern, most commonly starting in late fall and improving in spring.

Typical features include **persistent low mood, low energy, decreased motivation, increased sleep** (hypersomnia), **increased appetite**—especially carb cravings—**withdrawal from activities**, and **difficulty concentrating**.

It's more than a "winter slump." The key is the pattern: **symptoms reliably show up during certain months and remit during others**. A less common variant occurs in spring/summer with different features like insomnia and poor appetite.



# WINTER BLUES V/S SAD

**Winter Blues:** Mild, short-lived, manageable

**SAD:** ≥2 weeks, impairing, recurrent pattern; may require clinical care

If your energy, sleep, appetite, and mood changes are noticeable to others and make work or relationships hard, that's a flag for evaluation.

Both benefit from routines, light exposure, and connection—but SAD often needs a more structured plan, and sometimes medication or therapy.

There are various and complex causes of behavioral health disorders, including genetic factors, brain chemistry, traumatic life events, and environmental stressors.

## Biological Factors

- Genetics /Family history
- Brain chemistry imbalance
- Physical brain injuries
- Hormonal imbalances
- Chronic medical conditions

## Psychological Factors

- Trauma and abuse
- Stressful life events
- Negative thinking patterns
- Attachment issues
- Substance use or addiction

## Environmental Factors

- Major life changes
- Exposure to violence or conflict
- Environmental toxins
- Workplace or academic pressures
- Discrimination or stigma

## RISK FACTORS

- Northern latitude / less sunlight
- Family history of depression
- Female gender (higher prevalence)
- Low serotonin or vitamin D levels
- Chronic stress or co-occurring mental health concerns

## WARNING SIGNS

- Mood/behavior changes persist most days for 2+ weeks
- Decline in school or daily function
- Big sleep/appetite shifts
- Persistent withdrawal or irritability
- Self-harm talk or behavior = urgent

For screening, tools like the PHQ-9 can flag depressive symptoms, and the Seasonal Pattern Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) helps identify seasonality.

# GRIEF 101 - MANAGING HOLIDAY WAVES



Grief is a healthy, adaptive response to loss—emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual. It’s not linear. Expect fluctuations (good days, hard days, sudden surges). It isn’t a problem to “fix,” but a process to live through. Healing usually means integrating the loss, not forgetting.

## COMMON NON-DEATH LOSSES:

- Relationship endings/divorce
- Infertility/miscarriage
- Job or role loss
- Health/function changes
- Displacement/migration
- Estrangement
- Pet death
- Identity or future-dreams lost.

## HOW GRIEF SHOWS UP:

### Emotional:

- Sadness, longing, guilt, anger, anxiety, numbness, relief, irritability

### Cognitive:

- Rumination, “Why” questions, intrusive images, concentration/ memory issues, disbelief

### Physical:

- Fatigue, sleep and appetite changes, aches, chest tightness, GI upset, restlessness

### Behavioral:

- Withdrawal or clinging, avoiding reminders or seeking them, changes in habits or rituals

### Social/Spiritual:

- Shifts in roles/dynamics, loneliness, questions about meaning, faith struggles or comfort in faith

**SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF GRIEF IS INTENSE OR IF THERE ARE THOUGHTS OF SELF-HARM OR SUICIDE.**

# UNDERSTANDING GRIEF TRIGGERS

A grief trigger is any cue—external or internal—that suddenly brings a wave of grief to the surface. It can stir strong emotion, memories, or body sensations, often without warning. Common grief triggers may include:

1

## External reminders:

- Anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, seasons
- Places and objects (their chair, hospital, clothing, recipes)
- Sensory cues: a song, smell, voice message, cologne, foods

2

## Social/digital:

- Photo albums, “memories” notifications, obituaries
- Life announcements (pregnancies, weddings, retirements)

3

## Internal states:

- HALT: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
- Stress, illness, hormonal shifts, dreams or nightmares

4

## Milestones and role changes:

- Graduations, moves, empty-chair moments at gatherings
- Doing a task they used to do; changing routines

5

## Ambiguous/anticipatory:

- Loved one’s declining health, uncertain outcomes, unresolved goodbyes

**MYTH:**  
Grief has 5 stages you must finish

**REALITY:**  
Emotions come & go; there’s no finish line.

**MYTH:**  
Time heals all wounds.

**REALITY:**  
What you do with time—support, rituals, meaning—matters.

**MYTH:**  
Strong people don’t cry.

**REALITY:**  
Tears are a healthy regulation response.

**MYTH:**  
Talking makes it worse.

**REALITY:**  
Gentle sharing often eases isolation.

# SUPPORTING YOUTH DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays can bring both joy and stress for youth. Seasonal changes may lower mood or energy, and some may show signs of SAD like oversleeping, irritability, or trouble focusing. Grief can also surface around holidays or anniversaries, sometimes hidden behind “I’m fine.” Keeping routines predictable and offering choices can ease pressure and support emotional well-being.



## Caregiver Playbook

- Give youth agency with clear limits (e.g., “Stay for an hour or skip”).
- Name what’s normal and treatable: shorter days can impact energy.
- Encourage morning light/outdoor time and regular sleep/wake.
- Co-create a 10-minute micro-joy list and do at least one together.
- Support triangle: one trusted adult, one peer/activity buddy, one professional or resource.

## QUICK TOOLS YOUTH CAN TRY

### Calendar Defense

Protect your time by scheduling “rest blocks” in your calendar the same way you would schedule an event or appointment. These blocks are short, intentional moments to recharge.

### Help List

Make a “help list” of three people or supports you can turn to if things start feeling heavy—this can include a friend, cousin, teacher, counselor, or even a helpline. Write it down or save it in your phone so you have quick access when you need to talk or get grounded.

### 90-Second Breath

When emotions spike, try the 90-second breath technique: inhale through your nose for 4 seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.

### Light Map

Create a “light map” for your mornings—try spending at least 10 minutes near natural light (like by a window or outside) soon after waking up.

### 3-Thing Micro-Joy Menu

Keep a short menu of three small things that bring you a spark of joy—like favorite snacks, songs, or a funny video. When things feel tense, pick one from your menu as a quick reset to remind yourself that small moments of good still exist, even in tough times.



# COPING TOOLKIT

Use this toolkit to manage intense grief waves. Name the emotion, ground yourself using your senses, breathe deeply, choose a micro-action, and give yourself permission to reduce demands. These steps can help you feel safer and more in control.



## COPING STRATEGIES



### 3-STEP MINDFULNESS

**Step 1:**

Step out of the “auto-pilot” to bring awareness to what you are doing, thinking, and sensing at this moment.

**Step 2:**

Bring awareness to breathing for six breaths or a minute.

**Step 3:**

Expand awareness outward, first to the body and then to the environment.

### SURGE PLANS

**Purpose:**

To support ourselves or others through sudden spikes of intense emotion, stress, or grief during the holidays.

**Step 1:**

NAME IT: “This is a grief wave.”

**Step 2:**

GROUND: 5-4-3-2-1 senses or hold a comforting object.

**Step 3:**

BREATHE: In 4, hold 2, out 6 for 3-5 cycles.

**Step 4:**

CHOOSE A MICRO-ACTION: Step outside, drink water, text a support, listen to a specific song.

**Step 5:**

PERMISSION: Reduce demands; it’s okay to do less today.





## **DBT-INSPIRED RAPID CALM (TIPP)**

### **Purpose:**

Reduces overwhelm and decision fatigue in the moment; helps you feel safer, more grounded, and more in control.

**TEMPERATURE:** Cool water on face/neck or hold an ice pack wrapped in a cloth.

**INTENSE MOVEMENT:** 60 seconds of brisk movement.

**PACED BREATHING:** Slow, extended exhale.

**PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION:** Tense-release major muscle groups.



## **DAILY ANCHORS**

### **Purpose:**

Short, repeatable habits that stabilize your day. Ideally, 15-30 minutes total.

### **Body:**

- Light exposure (morning daylight)
- Gentle movement (10-20 min walk/stretch)
- Hydration + regular meals

### **Mind:**

- 3-minute breathing or meditation
- 5-minute journal: "What do I need today—body, mind, heart?"

### **Connection:**

- One honest check-in (text/call)
- Pet care, community hello, or brief group chat

### **Meaning:**

- Do one value-aligned action (kindness, creativity, learning)
- Micro-ritual: light a candle, speak their name

## COPING STRATEGIES

### JOURNALING PROMPTS

Choose 1 or create your own

What do I miss most today—and what does that reveal about what mattered?

One small memory I want to keep vivid is...

If love could speak to me right now, it would say...

What feels unfinished, and what would “good-enough”

How has this loss reshaped my values or priorities?



### CONVERSATION STARTERS

For Caregivers Supporting Youth Through the Holidays

“On a scale 1–5, how’s today?”

“Do you want to talk or just hang?”

“Two choices: stay one hour or skip.”

“Shorter days can drain energy—sound familiar?”

“What’s one 10-minute joy we can do?”

### SETTING EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Scripts to Protect Your Energy & Reduce Resentment.

“I’d love to join, but I need a quiet night tonight.”

“That topic feels tender—can we talk about something else?”

“I appreciate the invite, I’m keeping it simple this year.”

“I need a breather; I’ll be back in a few.”



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## 01 Crisis Text Line

**Text SILENCE to 741741** to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. The Crisis Text Line provides free, text-based support 24/7.

## 02 Suicide Prevention Lifeline (988)

Call the National Suicide Prevention at **9-8-8**. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

## 03 The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. Trevor Lifeline 1-866-488-7386; Trevor Chat **Text 'START' to 678-678**

## 04 National Institute of Mental Health

Visit [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov) to learn more about various mental health topics and scientific studies on depression, anxiety, PTSD and more. Download free resource guides and learn more about your options to get help.

## 05 Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrator (SAMHSA)

**Call 1-800-662-4357** to access national information about local mental health services and treatment. The federal agency that leads efforts to advance the behavioral health

## 06 Mental Health America

Ready to learn more about your mental health and talk with a provider? Start with a free mental health screening - Complete the screening by visiting [screening.mhanational.org](http://screening.mhanational.org)

# STAY CONNECTED WITH US



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