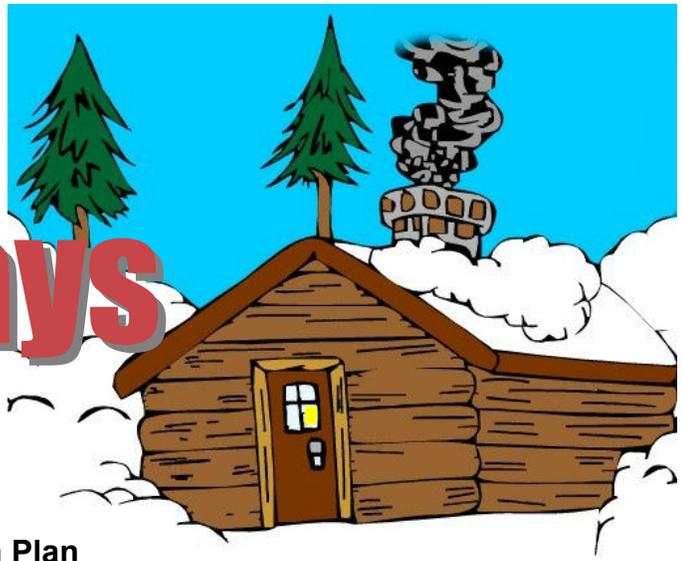


Alone for the Holidays



Holidays can be a lonely time for some. If you end up by yourself, there are a lot of creative ways to overcome the feeling of isolation.

No matter the time of year or season, develop life skills to avoid and intervene with loneliness, because research shows it can have adverse effects on health. Don't get mad at loneliness—get even using the ideas found below.

Being Alone Is Not Uncommon

Humans are social beings, so the holiday period always puts an accent on overcoming loneliness. With slightly more than half of Americans now single—the most in history—a sizeable portion of the population may spend the holidays on their own.

People end up as singletons on holidays for a variety of reasons. Some live far away from family or have jobs that require they work the holiday. Those who are grieving sometimes choose to spend the day alone. Others have dysfunctional families that can turn a happy holiday into a depressing day of drama that they would rather avoid. Some people need the social stimulation the holidays offer, while others may not.

Avoid the Rut and Triggers

If you find yourself without holiday plans and wish to celebrate, take action. Don't sit and reason, trying to think your way out of feeling bad or down.

The most effective way to intervene is by taking action. Behavior works faster on feelings than reasoning, and it's more efficient. Plan now, and create action steps. Doing so can help you avoid "depression triggers" that can throw you into a rut.

Create an Intervention Plan

Grab a calendar and plan concrete steps *in writing* that you will take when the holiday period arrives. Will you open your home to other single friends? Will you seek volunteer opportunities nearby? What about helping feed the homeless or perhaps singing carols at a nursing home? These activities are tried-and-true intervention steps others have used to overcome loneliness and experience gratitude.

Check the newspaper, and begin your to-do list of events, special "me-time" treats, day trips, and new and unusual ways to fill the days. Look for free events around town at galleries, museums, dressed-up old homes, and parades.

Look to your community for creative opportunities, such as spending the day with military members stationed in your town or baking cookies and taking them to your city's first responders.

"Reframe" Loneliness

Reframing is a healthy way of choosing to look at a situation another way. An example of a reframe is recognizing that although you can't be at a certain holiday event on a specific day and are alone right now, you will be with those people you care about or love in the future at another specific event, so you choose to look forward to that time instead of feeling trapped in a lonely state at the moment.

Avoid Social Media Tailspin

Social media can contribute to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression, especially during the holidays. So, consider limiting your time online. At the very least, remain aware of its potential to show you an unrealistic view of life—friends post only the good.

Yes, Google It

A quick way to find 1,001 ideas to intervene with loneliness is to search "how to avoid loneliness during the holidays." It's nearly guaranteed that you will find ideas appropriate for your situation.

Engagement Is the Secret

The secret to lifting your spirit is engagement with others. Enjoy the holidays whether you are with others or alone. However, be sure you experience daily interactions with people to safeguard your health throughout the year. You will feel more uplifted, experience less negative self-talk, and have accomplishments you will look back on with fond memories.

