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The Silent Struggle: Social Isolation During the Holidays

As we head into the holiday season once again and begin to gather with family and friends, many Americans face feelings of loneliness and isolation during the holidays. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, social isolation and loneliness are significant public health concerns. According to a report, “the lack of social connection poses a significant risk for individual health and longevity. Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively. More broadly, lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.” These findings are significant and should not be ignored. This isolation is more than just an emotional burden it is a serious health concern.

Holidays can hit people especially hard. There are expectations from society that you are supposed to be happy during this time of year, after all, as the song by Andy Williams goes, “it’s the most wonderful time of the year”. If this is true, why do we sometimes not feel this way? There are several reasons why this might be.

- **Unrealistic Expectations:** Many of us want the holidays to be perfect. Lofty expectations can create undue pressure for us to live up to a picture-perfect holiday.
- **Living alone,** being unable to leave your home, or feeling isolated and disconnected from others.
- **Suffering from grief and loss:** Many have lost people they are close to, a spouse, a friend.
- **Being a caregiver:** Caregivers often feel alone in their struggles. The pressure to make things perfect is frequently overwhelming.

What can you do to reduce the sense of loneliness you or others feel? Below are some tips to help make you feel more connected.

- Attend events and programs at local community centers, schools, or churches.
- Participate in a local exercise group.
- Volunteer with local charities or organizations.
- Share stories about a loved one you have lost or make their favorite recipe to share with others.
- Schedule some time to connect with family, friends, or neighbors.
- Limit social media time as it can trigger anxiety or feelings of inadequacy.

Remember to try and focus on the moment and enjoy the time without expecting everything to go flawlessly. Realize that traditions can change over the years, and that’s okay. Reach out intentionally to those you know who may be struggling with loneliness.

The world we live in can be challenging and polarizing. Seek out professional help if you are showing signs of depression. Contact the suicide and crisis lifeline if you or someone you know is considering harming themselves at 988.