



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

☐ Understanding Holiday Stress

As we once again enter into the holiday season, it may be for some of us a time of significant stress, a time during which family conflicts escalate, a time when painful childhood memories intrude, or, a time when the loss of a loved one aches more profoundly. It is also a time when we risk losing our spiritual perspective to the pressures of buying the latest gadget, or toy, or the most expensive athletic shoe. The focus on that which really matters- the significance of the birth of Jesus- has greater importance than getting the turkey cooked or getting to the store to see if there are any Game Boys left. As such, many of us reach Christmas evening season exhausted and depressed. According to the American Institute of Stress, more than 110 million Americans take medication for stress related causes each week. When the holidays come along, people already predisposed to stress can find themselves feeling blue and more stressed out than usual.

For those who don't ordinarily feel stressed under the pressure of events or deadlines, the holidays can still play havoc with our lives. So what can we do? Plan for stress, say the experts, just like you plan ahead for any calamity you want to avoid. And for some of us that may involve dealing with the healing process of someone we lost to death.

☐ Consider Your Attitude

Those of us who have lost a life partner, child, parent, or close friend, the holiday season may be fraught with emotional pain. Our best and worst memories are often generated in the crucible of a holiday celebration. The intense yearning for this person can be overwhelming especially when we see other people laughing and enjoying the presence of someone that reminds us of our loved one. Without warning, memories of how the person did certain things, what they said, their likes and dislikes, and their unique and individual contribution to the celebration come pouring back, leaving in their wake the felt void of the person's presence. As counselors, we can help the individual realize in advance that the holidays WILL be different, that there will be feelings of sadness and loss, as well as memories that may be happy, but poignant. Therefore, one way to make the holidays meaningful is to make the effort to cultivate memories. Even if those around them are not able to drop their expectations that everyone is supposed to be appropriately "cheerful," they can change their attitude about themselves. Secondly, it is often giving that helps to ease the pain of loss. There are many positive ways of giving which can also allow someone to continue in their healing process. Giving can be an expression of love and gratitude, an act of assertive acknowledgment in their immediate environment. Giving can bring fulfillment and help stay in touch with oneself. Consider a way in which the individual can express

their gratitude for the relationship they had with the person who has died. Is there a way to make a contribution to one of their favorite charities in their name? There are many opportunities for sharing with and helping others. And don't forget to remind them that it is also OK to give to themselves. In other words, to treat oneself may mean the difference between experiencing emotional wholeness or emotional suffering.

☐ Consider Good Nutrition

Lucy Gilles-Khouri, Director of Dean/St. Mary's Healthworks at St. Mary's Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, says, "The holidays can play havoc with our health. In winter we tend to crave fats and sweets, but ironically, the more fat and sugar we eat, the less energy we have, and the more stressed and run down we feel." I am amazed by the frequency of occasions people find themselves surrounded by holiday sweets and treats. Gilles-Khouri recommends eating in moderation. "Reprogram your thinking. Don't think if some is good, more is better." Nutrition can play a big part in reducing stress. "When our bodies aren't operating at peak efficiency, we feel stressed, and our immune systems aren't operating at the level they should be," comments Gilles-Khouri. Eat simple, she suggests -- an apple instead of a piece of apple pie -- for keeping the stress levels down. "Cut back on fat sources, make butter cookies with margarine instead of butter, and don't forget to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables

each day." When you eat simple foods, Gilles-Khouri says you have a better chance of alleviating holiday stress. "Enjoy the people instead of the food," she advises. A good suggestion for making Christmas a great success.

📌 Consider Exercise

Exercise is another important stress reducer -- particularly during the winter, when many people seem to be less active as they are during other times of the year. Experts say exercise is one of the best ways to combat stress and anxiety. One suggestion: encourage the people we work in making a difference to their health regime by adding just 10 minutes of exercise to their daily routine. Jane Clark, Fitness Director at Millberry Recreation & Fitness Center at the Medical School at the University of California at San Francisco, says walking is one of the healthiest ways to reduce stress. Clark, who is involved with health promotion and is a certified instructor by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Counsel of Exercise, says, "Organize your activities so they include walking. Walk before the holiday dinner, walk after the dinner." She points out that while fitness programs are beneficial, it's easy to add exercise by just changing the patterns of your life. For example, divide laundry into several small loads. Then, make several trips up the stairs. It may take more time, but it actually helps us physical and emotionally. Another way to add in more exercise is to park as far as away from the shopping centers as possible. I do this anyway-in season and out-because of my obsessive-compulsivity about people

dinging my car. So, I don't really drive around looking for the closest place to the front door. But good exercise would dictate that we park away from the crowds. The extra exercise from walking is a health benefit -- to say nothing of the fact that you might avoid a fender bender (or a ding!) in a congested parking area -- a stressful situation in itself! Our clients will be more motivated to add exercise in their life if they "partner" with a friend. Clark notes, "When you've made a commitment to take a class with a friend, chances are you'll show up more often, and get more out of it -- plus, you'll have a built-in social outlet." I know this to be true especially when someone joins me when I go running outside. Here are a few things we can encourage those we work with so as to prevent burnout during the holidays:

- Have a positive attitude.
- Try not to worry about things out of your control.
- Problem solve with people around you. Ask them to help you alleviate stress.
- Exercise. A few extra minutes of exercise a day can benefit your overall health.
- Eat Nutritional food. Decrease the amount of fat and sugar you eat.
- Meditate, or take a class in relaxation and stretching techniques
- Avoid drinking caffeinated beverages.
- Rest. Try to get eight hours of sleep each day.
- Get a massage. A massage can be beneficial for the mind and body.

📌 When the Stress is Too Much

For many people, the combination of stress from the holidays, work, troubled relationships or health problems can become over-

whelming. The holidays can bring back a host of confusing feelings and memories. Sometimes an individual may be tempted to dwell on good times that involved drinking and drug use. For some, this time of year provokes painful childhood memories if they grew up in a troubled home. Others experience loads of stress, disappointment, and loneliness during the holidays. The worst thing to do is to keep all those feelings bottled up inside. Encourage them to find trusted friends and support groups where they can share what is going on within them. This is a sure fire way to stay in perspective and work through the emotions in constructive and healthy ways.

The ancient Jewish prophets called Jesus "the Prince of Peace." When Jesus came, the Christmas angels promised He would be a Savior whose saving would bring peace. When He left, He promised: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you (John. 14:27)." His servant Paul summed it up when he reminded us: "He came and preached to you who were far away and peace to those who were near (Eph. 2:17)." Then, in six simple words, He spoke the prescription for peace: "For He Himself is our peace (Eph. 2:14)."

No matter what kind of stress may come into the paths of those we work with Jesus-the Prince of Peace- quietly whispers, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). Recognizing stress, then taking steps to reduce it, can help individuals and families survive a frantic season. They may even learn to love the speed bumps, also known as the most joyful time of the year, once again.

Merry Christmas!!!



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

Bob Good



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm (SCA Office)**

HOLIDAY STRESS: FACT OR FRICTION

While many associate the holidays with Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, and its theme of gaining and sharing the holiday spirit, the opening lines from A Tale of Two Cities may have even more relevance:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times
It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness...
It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Like Dickens, I too have tried to capture the complexity of the holidays; if not through a great novel, then with my one classic holiday joke. I realized with all this talk of pressure during the holidays, I needed to distinguish between "Holiday Blues" and "Holiday Stress." Now holiday blues is the feeling of loss or sadness that you have over the holidays when, for whatever reason, you can't be with those people who have been or are special and significant. And holiday stress...is when you "have" to be with some of those people! For many people the conventional greeting at this time of year, "Happy Holidays" or "Merry Christmas" has an ironic ring to it that it can provide bitter reminders of all the things that are expected of us, and all the things we cannot do. House guests arrive, party invitations come in the mail, gifts must be purchased and delivered. There are cookies to bake, cards to sign and address, decorations to put up, and a host of other commitments to be met.

It all seems so impossible that it's no wonder the winter holiday season is often more stressful than pleasurable. In my counseling studies I have learned that our holiday ritual has a profound effect on people. Requests for counseling are highest after the holiday period. Sales of self-help and personal development books peak in the early year. Sadly, suicide rates are highest at Christmas, and in the spring months, when the weather gets better but people don't. What can we do to help people make positive changes? Here are some suggestions to make the holidays as pleasant and stress-free as possible.

Sincerely,

Bob



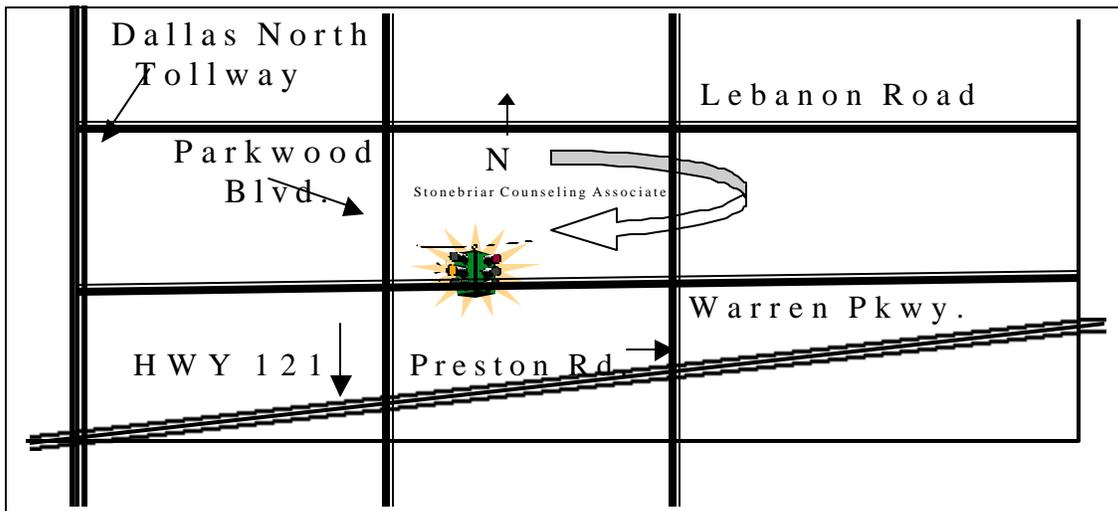
**Merry Christmas from all
of us at...
Stonebriar
Counseling Associates!**



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Site:
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Mission Statement

Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.





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