

When it's difficult to find joy during the holiday season

Feelings of loss, grief, loneliness, stress and conflict can all intensify during a holiday season. Putting on a "brave" face and being with a crowd may take more energy than you have, yet being alone does not make it any better. The pause of "normal" routine and structure of a school or work day can also intensify feelings of discomfort. Holiday and family function "busyness" can be overwhelming.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross, a Psychologist who is well known for her expert work in grief said:

"People are like stained - glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within".

We all have light from within, yet at times when your light may be faint, gift yourself ways that will allow you to still see your beauty. Let others help your light to shine. Leave a light on to help yourself. Give gifts to yourself to help this light to shine brighter. Hold onto hope that your light will not be faint forever.

Gift yourself some self-care. It is something that most of us are not good at. Gift yourself an activity that makes your heart smile, if only for moments at a time. Specific memories that when your eyes are closed make you smile can be images that you treat yourself with when times are difficult. When was the last time you did something that made you smile as a child? Gift yourself with patience – breathe when demands are placed on you and gift yourself breath before responding to any request, text, invitation, demand or conversation. Gift yourself stillness, because we are a culture that thrives on constant movement. Slow down. Put electronics away for periods of time and gift yourself time alone. Gift yourself honesty when you have had enough and accept it. Don't push yourself. Rest. Gift yourself treats, but be mindful of things like coffee, energy drinks, alcohol or drugs that will move you away from the self-care you need and deserve. Gift yourself with warm tea, water and good sleep.

A group of Grade 1 students recently did a project on the 5 senses and they were to draw a picture of how to see, smell, taste, touch, and hear JOY. Interestingly enough not one student drew a purchased item to complete their project. I thought it was perfect lesson to share with you as part of this article as it was so inspiring and illustrated that finding joy can be done in such simple, often overlooked ways . **See** joy in little children tobogganing or building a snowman; **hear** laughter or birds singing; **smell** home baked treats or fresh air after the snow falls. **Taste** the falling snow on your tongue; **feel** the warmth of a fire or the "prickles" of a Christmas tree, or the beating of your own heart.

If you or someone you love could use further assistance with coping over the holidays, you can call our family of schools Social Worker Cathy McDonald-Reis.

If you or a loved one is in need of assistance during the Christmas Holidays, consider the following resources:

Here 24/7 – for any mental health crisis or consultation – 1 844 437 3247

Safe Haven Youth Shelter – 519 749 1450

Women's Crisis Safety Shelter – 519 742-5894

Emergency Food Hamper Program – 519 742 0662

Helpful websites that also offer resources and positive inspiration:

www.kidshelpphone.ca

www.mindyourmind.ca

www.calm.com

www.copingcentre.com