

## Ep. 28: Holiday Blues

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960<sup>th</sup> Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Light music)

Good day Gladiators, thank you for listening to another episode of the "Sword and Shield" podcast. This is Frances Martinez, Director of Psychological Health for the 960th Cyberspace Wing, here with a very special guest on the phone from Travis Air Force Base. - Hi, thank you for having me, Frances. My name's Yendi Cardenas. I'm a licensed clinical social worker. I'm one of the mental health providers at the outpatient mental health clinic at David Grant Medical Center on Travis Air Force Base in California. - So thank you so much, Yendi, for joining us today. You know, I will really wanted to kick off December with holiday blues, especially during COVID. So holiday blues, some people have heard it, you know, some little depression symptoms. But, you know, I think we're in a different time right now with COVID, you know, adding those additional stressors. - No, I agree, you're completely correct. This is a tricky time for everybody, and it's really testing our resiliency and how quickly we can adapt to different situations. I tell my clients it's kind of a tricky time for us as therapists, because what usually works, like going to spend time with family or, you know, not isolating as much, is not necessarily very feasible right now, especially in California, because of the pandemic. So you're absolutely correct. It's a tricky time, difficult time for everybody. - So I wanna touch on, you know, some signs and symptoms of, you know, holiday blues versus, you know, major depressive disorder. - So that's a good, I'm glad you brought that up, because holiday blues is an absolutely, it's a thing. For some people, they don't, like for some people it's a myth, but holiday blues is an actual thing. And the signs and symptoms can mimic major depression and even anxiety symptoms, because you are experiencing those symptoms. The only difference is that when we experience blues, like a down, low mood during the holidays, it's more temporary. Typically it should resolve after the holidays are over. But some of the symptoms that you should be aware of is that you could feel more tired. You could feel physical symptoms like tensions. You might experience more headaches, frustration. You might feel like you're in this, like, little low funk that you can't really explain. Sadness, a sense of loss. Maybe even, you might be experiencing uncontrollable worry. I don't know, Frances, if I'm forgetting any of 'em, but those are kind of, maybe your appetite, notice changes in your appetite or behavior. - Difficulty sleeping sometimes, right? - Right, for sure, difficulty sleeping or even staying asleep. Or maybe you're sleeping too much, which might not be typical for you normally. - And, you know, holidays are generally, for most people, a jolly great time, right? But some people, they really do carry around the holiday blues. And something to also note, you know, seasonal changes. It gets dark earlier. You know, so we're losing some of that daylight. That kind of, you

know, puts an emphasis, you know, on our mood as well. - Oh yeah, for sure. I also think, if we wanna go back to bring up some, like, experiences we might be experiencing that's atypical because of COVID, I mean, we might even be experiencing a little bit of grief. You know, we're grieving that, you know, we can't, I know for me, it's sad that I can't fly back home to Texas to go spend time with my family. I haven't been able to do that in a while. So, you know, we might also be experiencing something along the lines of, you're grieving maybe what last holiday season used to be like, or what you think the holiday season is supposed to be about. - Right, and that added stress of COVID is really tipping the scales, you know. We're disconnected, for the most, part from our families. And then, you know, I know California went on lockdown again. And so those are, you know, difficult things to deal with, especially on top of some mental health issues. - Right, you're absolutely correct. And, you know, speaking of the lockdown, we are, like, here at Travis, our county's not yet locked down, but the surrounding counties are, so anticipating that maybe. But even if we don't go on full lockdown again, it's just even the unknown can change our mood and the way we react to things. You know, we might become more irritable, might become frustrated just because we don't know what tomorrow's going to bring. - Yeah and, you know, dealing with our added stresses, right. How do we look at that? I know the biggest thing that I always recommend is acknowledging your feelings. Don't sweep it under the rug. You know, if you've been going through something, it's okay to feel sad. And we want to normalize that and, you know, try to get, you know, if you're sad, cry it out, speak to someone, call someone and work out, you know, those feelings. I hear a lot of the times, like, you know, I'm strong. Well being strong is also asking for help. - Mm-hmm. No, I completely agree. I think being vulnerable with yourself and asking for help is one of the most, it shows the most strength, I think, of any behavior, to be able to say, like, I need something more. Like, I need help. And you're absolutely right, being mindful and being present and experience any emotion that you might come across, and being like, "Okay sadness, I know you're here." You know, what do we need to do so that I can feel better. - Mm-hmm. And it's funny when you say that, I kinda think of that movie "Inside Out," right. Sadness is, everything they touch kind of, you know, the happy memories and the joyful memories, they kinda turn, you know, blue and sad as well. And so it's really important to stay, you know, in the moment and be present, and kind of focus on the important things for us now. And obviously those have shifted because we are in this pandemic. But, you know, try to find the good in every day. - Right. And some other tips that you can do to kind of avoid the holiday blues, obviously is first, like you said, acknowledging what you are experiencing and knowing when you need to reach out to somebody for help. But also, you know, maybe before you get to that point, you know, it might be beneficial that, you know, you set up a routine as much as possible, and you stick to that routine. Or maybe even, you know, I know finances during the holiday season is a stressor for a lot of folks. And so maybe setting up a budget for yourself can reduce some stress or some, you know, self-loathing thoughts, like, oh my gosh, I don't have enough money to afford this or that, you know. But like you said, being grateful for what you can, you know, what you do have. I think another tip for avoiding the holiday blues is just really setting realistic expectations for yourself, and doing your best not to isolate.

I'm not sure what that looks like for everybody depending on where they're at, but there are ways that you can spend time with friends and family and your support network, even though it might not be in person. Can you think of any other tips? - Well, I was talking to Colonel Erredge this weekend about going on a drive. They have the drive-through light displays. You know, we can't do a lot of things out in public, but you know, we can go look at lights. We can even, you know, for those that, you know, are into the holidays, decorating your home. I know some people say, you know, it's not even worth it this year, but why not. COVID of course has been a huge damper on everything around the world, but it shouldn't take away those joys that we normally have. And so, keeping the routine or your traditions that you normally do, you know, to keep, you know, some of the holiday spirit going. - Oh yeah, no, I completely agree. Because you know, whether this is a traditional normal holiday season versus now when it's, you know, during the pandemic, I think like, you know, whatever you do have control over, like how you decorate your house and how you decide to spend your holiday, I think we have to really, like, take a hold of that and really focus on what we do have control over. And I say go for it. So I completely agree. Outdo your house, if you can't afford, you know, to buy expensive decorations, then how about craft stuff. You know, whether you have children, you can craft some with your family. Or, you know, if you're single and living alone, you can still make your own, you know, create your own holiday spirit in your own space. - Yeah. And I think people- - I think too, though, like, it's also important that you maintain healthy habits, like eating and drinking healthy. - I was just going to say that. - You know, avoiding alcohol, if you're already feeling down and depressed or anxious. And you know, really, I think it's just, you know, really taking a look at what we do have and being grateful for that. But then even if, you know, even if those gratitudes are just really small, like, so for a lot of people, when they're really already feeling down, you know, maybe just even getting out of bed is a huge obstacle for them. So, you know, giving yourself credit for even those small little achievements you do every day really can build up and go a long way in the long run, which I think is very important. You know? - Yeah. And I think some of the stress, you know, when we talked about holiday blues, people feel so overwhelmed, right, with the demands of Christmas shopping or holiday shopping, parties, you know, decorating, finances, family issues. And it kind of all comes to a head. So, you know, being mindful and learning to say no. Like, it's okay to say no. Set up your own personal boundaries. Don't overextend yourself. Because a lot of those times when we do that, you know, we start feeling like we're going to crack. And, you know, we're trying to mitigate and find, you know, other avenues to get the help or support that you need. And so, again, it's okay to ask for help. But it's also okay to say no. - I think that's fantastic you brought that up, 'cause a lot of people (chuckle) forget that that's okay. And it's really liberating the first time you say no to somebody (chuckle) active, if it's been a problem before, you know. But you're absolutely right. And during the holidays, and you have to be your own advocate. And, you know, if you're not going to take care of yourself, then who will, right? And so you need to set, going back to setting realistic expectations, you need to know, like, where your boundaries are, what you are and what you're not willing to do. And then be okay with saying no. - Yeah. (Speaking simultaneously) Self-care is

always number one. And it's really hard for people to do, to really take care of themselves. And sometimes they get lost, you know, and they worry about taking care of their kids and their spouse and, you know, their other family members. And they forget about taking care of themselves. But it's really important to dedicate, you know, minimum of 15 minutes a day to yourself, you know, to either, you know, take a walk, listening to music, or even, you know, reading a book, or something to spend that quality time with yourself. - Or even just listening to your favorite radio station or Spotify playlist or Pandora station. And I like to tell my clients, like, self-care, it can be anything, as long as you're focusing on yourself. So even if, you know, you're cooking dinner for your family, you know, being very present in the moment. For a lotta people, you know, cooking can bring them joy, right? - Mm-hmm. - Or when you're drinking your coffee in the morning, like, really being present and focusing on what your coffee smells like, what it tastes like. And so, 'cause I know a lot of people get kinked up when I'm like, you know, "Take care of yourself, "make sure you focus on self-care." And they're like, "Well, what do you mean? "I can't go get a massage," or "I can't go get a pedicure." I think for a lotta people, that's what self-care is, so I'm glad you brought up other examples. But self-care really is just about focusing on yourself and being present with yourself, at least, you know, for 15 minutes a day. - And, you know, again, seeking help. And so what does that look like. So we do have a unit out there at Travis. And so if someone is needing to seek help, how do they go about doing that with the mental health clinic there? - So if you notice that your symptoms or your mood is getting worse and it's not really as temporary as you had hoped, you can reach our outpatient mental health clinic. Our phone number is 707-423-5174. And any of our fantastic mental health technicians who answer our phones can get you set up with the right resources and point you in the right direction. You know, you can also contact the national suicide prevention lifeline. And that number is 1-800-273-8255. We also utilize the military crisis line. And their number is 1-800-213-8235. So if anybody's needing help in our area, you can just contact our clinic, and any of our great staff members can get you the resources you need. - Well, thank you for sharing that, Yendi. And, you know, to try and combat holiday blues and COVID blues, we at the wing are having a Holiday Cheer 5k and Scavenger Hunt through the end of December. So our Gladiators can visit our Facebook group page for the details, at 960th CW Gladiators. Also, we're having a virtual Santa visit on Saturday, December 19th, from 1200 to 1400 central time, for all the children in our wing. If you are interested in having your family Zoom with Santa, you can email me at Frances.Martinez.2@US.af.mil so we can get that scheduled. Yendi provided the suicide prevention hotline number, but I just want to reiterate. It's 1-800-273-8255. If you don't know who to turn to, you know, anyone in our wing, family members included, can call me and we can work through some stuff, and also get you pointed in the right direction. So I want to thank you, Yendi, for joining us today. And, you know, mental health clinic, especially at Travis, we're trying to spread the word of what we have going on out in the wing. And we really appreciate you joining us today. And I hope all of our Gladiators, you know, have a happy holiday season. Please remember to take care of yourselves and your families. And we look forward to a better 2021. So I want to thank everyone for listening in today. Gladiators out. (Mellow music)