

Happy
Holidays



December Newsletter

The Quiet Zone

FREE - Please take a copy

Suite 105, Level 1, 781 Pacific Highway, Chatswood NSW 2067

Our December Newsletter includes articles on coping with grief and loss, appreciating the positives of the holiday period, and stress management tips. In addition, our Practice operating hours over the December and January period are detailed for each of our Psychologists.

Practice hours

Our Practice hours during the Christmas, Hanukkah and School holiday period are:

June Gay, Principal Psychologist

Christmas: Closed from Tuesday 24th December, reopening Monday 6th January.

School holidays: Closed 14th to 19th January, 27th to 29th January, 2020

Veronica Engel, Principal Psychologist

Christmas: Closed from Tuesday 24th December, reopening on Wednesday 8th January.

School holidays: Closing 22nd January, reopening 29th January, 2020.

Willian Fu, Psychologist

Closed from Monday 23rd December, reopening on Monday 6th January, 2020.

If you have concerns about your mental health during this period, you should contact your GP or one of the following crisis services:

Lifeline (anyone having a personal crisis) – call 13 11 14 or chat online

Kids Helpline (24/7 phone and online chat for young people aged 5-25 years) – call 1800 55 1800

Suicide Call Back Service (anyone thinking about suicide) – call 1300 659 467



Grief and Loss

Hanukkah and Christmas can be a troubling and lonely time for people who have suffered major losses in their lives, especially if it is the first celebration since the loss. Loss includes the death of a loved one, or any significant relationship, the loss of a job or important role.

There is no “right” way to experience loss – we are all different in the intensity, duration and expression of our grief. If you do find that you are flooded with sad memories and strong feelings, this is normal and acceptable. It is important to acknowledge whatever feeling that you experience and consider ways to cope.

It is OK to give yourself permission to enjoy yourself if you want to – there are going to be moments when you do feel okay or even happy, or forget your grief for a moment. This is **not a betrayal of your loved one**. It is part of healing and will happen more and more as you move through your grief.

Loved ones are part of our significant life milestones, and the events themselves can feel less meaningful without them. Rituals in honour of a deceased person can be comforting and add meaning for some. This includes making an appreciation toast about the person, playing their favourite song and taking a moment to remember them, lighting a candle, looking at photos. A moment set aside for you to acknowledge your feelings.

It may also be beneficial to make plans for Christmas/Hanukkah – being alone can sometimes intensify feelings and thoughts about your loss. Having somewhere to go or something to do on Christmas day, **even for a couple of hours**, will break up the day and create opportunities for support and connection.

Grief is something that takes time to work through. While everyone finds their own way to grieve it's important to have the support of friends and family or someone else, and to talk about your loss when you need to. This may be to a good listener in your family/friends or your Psychologist. Writing down your feelings can also be psychologically beneficial.

Is it depression?

Grief and depression are quite different but they can appear similar as they can both lead to feelings of intense sadness, insomnia, poor appetite and weight loss. Depression stands out from grief as being more persistent, with constant feelings of emptiness and despair and a difficulty feeling pleasure or joy.

If you notice that depression symptoms continue, or your grief begins to interfere with your daily functioning, then it's important to get support or professional help.

School Holiday Pressures

The school holiday period is a change of routine for parents and children. Some coping strategies:

- Plan ahead to ensure that you and your children have adequate social activities.
- If possible, take a holiday with your children to allow the family to relax together.
- Remember that children have been at school for the entire year and probably need time to relax and reconnect.
- Encourage your children to play outdoors and connect with nature.
- Set healthy time limits on technology use for the entire family. Discuss these at the beginning of the holidays.
- Discuss behavioural expectations, if needed.
- Have empathy if your children get a bit bored. Depending on their age, consider entertainment options.
- School holidays can be a difficult time for working parents. Juggling work while trying to find suitable care options for children is definitely not an easy task. To alleviate this pressure, it can be helpful to organise care options in advance.

June Gay, Principal Psychologist

Appreciation Opportunities

While the holiday season can add pressure to daily life, there are many positives during this period. Some examples include:

- Spending quality time with family or loved ones
- Opportunity to show generosity and kindness to others
- Fun and pleasant activities
- Time off work.
- Opportunity to stay in bed, relax, go for a walk etc.
- Christmas Parties and socialising.
- The joy on children's faces at Christmas.
- Gifts – it is lovely to give and receive.
- Christmas Markets.
- Special occasion dinners and meals
- Family rituals around Christmas and Hanukkah can be enjoyable and positively anticipated. They can promote a sense of togetherness and sharing.
- Travelling and adventures.
- Opportunity to slow down and appreciate life.



Acknowledging the Pressure

Unfortunately, the holiday season can also be an emotionally provocative time of year, where pressures may become overwhelming and unpleasant. Typical triggers include family responsibilities, gift expectations, financial concerns, clashing beliefs, as well as religious obligations. Ongoing family tension or conflict can also create a sense of dread and worry.

Further, the holiday season can be a stressful time for relationships, with an increase in the number of break-ups and divorces over this period.

Coping strategies

In order to cope with these potential stresses and pressure points, it may be helpful to identify and plan coping strategies. Some ideas include:

- Contemplate your choices carefully. Consider whether the choice to participate in a ritual or occasion is in your best interest.
- Contemplate and implement boundaries with others about topics and behaviour.
- Minimise exposure to distressing people.
- If appropriate, set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion
- Where possible, try to focus on areas of similarity and the positives of these relationships.
- Plan your time so that you do not over commit yourself socially.
- Decide ahead of time how much alcohol and heavy food you are able to consume without negatively affecting your health.
- Do not over extend yourself financially.
- Disconnect from Work.
- Consider unplugging from technology to be more present with your family.
- If feeling overwhelmed, create a to-do list and plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, cooking, visiting friends and other activities.

- Reach out - If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social groups. They can offer support and companionship.
- Volunteering your time to help others is a meaningful way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
- Don't abandon healthy habits. Over-indulgence will only add to your stress and guilt.
- Be aware that your self-talk may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you tell yourself that you will be miserable, chances are that you will be convinced.
- Be practical – book appointments that are tricky to do during the year (eg. Dental, Eye tests, skin checks, car service etc)

Frequently throughout each day we are required to attend to multiple things at once to get through our tasks. Sometimes, if we try to fit too many things into our attention, they become chaotic, delayed, or incomprehensible.

Practicing paying attention to only on one thing at a time frees up our brain from the flood of unnecessary thoughts that we do not need to attend to at that moment. It also maximises our efficacy and attention to detail.

Imagine your mind functions like a paper shredder – each different shredder can process different numbers of paper simultaneously. Regardless, if you feed n more than it is designed to handle, it jams. When it jams nothing is working as intended, and you'll need to spend time unjamming it.

June Gay, Principal Psychologist

Being Mindful

Given that the holiday period is a busy time of pressure, fun and activities, it is important to take time to smell the frankincense and/or roses!

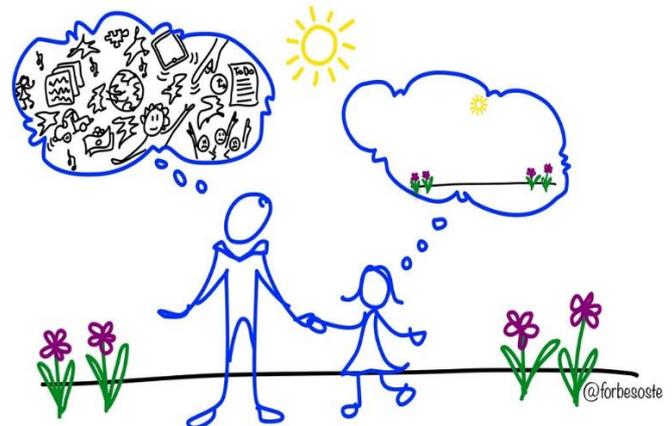
For those of you who are feeling a stressed or highly strung, you may already know that *meditation* is a good way to let things calm down, replenish and be the best version of yourself.

A big question that may arise for those who try meditation is "*How do I do this?*" or "*Am I doing this right?*" . The following is some guidelines about how to better pay attention.

Paying Attention

The first thing to be aware of is that meditation, mindfulness, or other similar practices are simply exercises that get you to focus your attention in a particular way.

Mind Full, or Mindful?



Similarly, if you have too many things capturing your attention, you likely find that none of them are being resolved properly because you're not allowing yourself the headspace to focus, process, and do the best that you can.

William Fu, Registered Psychologist

Please seek professional help if you are emotionally struggling during the holiday period. This is particularly important if you feel very sad, depressed or suicidal.