



When You Don't Feel the Holiday Cheer

Vincent J. Morello, Ph.D.

Revised and updated by Jill Adaman, Ph.D.

It's ironic how holidays can bring out emotional pain in a way no other time of the year can. During the holidays we're expected to be cheerful, generous, outgoing, and carefree. But for those of us experiencing economic or personal difficulties, the last thing we feel like doing is pretending to be cheerful.

It's not that we don't want to share holiday cheer with others; it's just that the high expectations of the holiday season serve as a bold reminder of how difficult things have been. And when we compare ourselves against the happy people we see on TV, we can see how far we come up short. To make things even harder, we often find ourselves spending time with people we perhaps would like to avoid. We may feel compelled to cook, clean, and shop for gifts when we really would prefer a vacation from the hassle of daily life. No wonder we can feel like Scrooge. So what should we do?

First, here are some don'ts:

- Don't automatically say yes to holiday invitations and requests. Limit your participation to activities that really mean something to you.
- Avoid being around difficult people to the extent possible.
- Try not to overdrink, overeat, or overwork.
- Don't spend more money than you're comfortable with.

Now, here's what to do:

- Slow down! Take time to look around you and let in some of the fun of the season.
- Spend time with people you really enjoy and with whom you share common values.
- Buy smaller gifts or give the gift of time doing an activity with someone. Feel good about not going into debt.
- Put yourself in the holiday equation by doing something nice for yourself.
- Ask for help or support from others if that is what you need. A willingness to accept help can be the most generous gift of all.