

Holiday Blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder Could Indicate Mental Illness

While the holidays are portrayed as a happy time of celebration, this is not true for everyone, especially in today's times of devastating incidents of violence and both the immediate and long-term effects of such tragedies. The one-year anniversary of the Newtown, CT, school shooting is a striking example. The loss of loved ones through suicide, accidents and other tragic situations also can make the holidays a difficult time for many people.

Studies indicate that one of every four New Jersey residents has a mental illness, such as depression or anxiety, which can be exacerbated during the holiday season. Furthermore, depression and anxiety can increase risk of substance use and suicide. It is critical to manage mental and physical health; recognize signs of mental illness, substance use and suicide risk; seek help when needed and encourage others to do so.

"Anyone could experience holiday blues, especially if they experience high levels of stress or emotionally taxing situations. For coping with disappointments and tragedies, it always helps to have trusted friends or family members - or, if needed, a professional - to confide in and work through the feelings that could interfere with life in general, not just enjoyment of the holidays," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA). "Stress often results from having unrealistic expectations for the holidays. The intensified impact of stress can be lessened by making time for ourselves, setting realistic financial and other expectations for the holidays and trying to create and share special family memories."

For more details, visit www.njamhaa.org.