

DEALING WITH DOUBLE TROUBLE: HOLIDAYS IN THE TIME OF COVID

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The stresses of Covid19 are many: job loss or insecurity, home schooling, financial strain, the restriction of outside activities and normal life, the seclusion from loved ones, and the fear of contracting (or worse, actually contracting) the virus. All these have weighed on us for many months, straining relationships between couples and families. According to Legal Templates service, requests for legal divorce documents increased by 34% merely between March and June



of 2020 as compared to the same timeframe in 2019. Anxiety, too, has reached an all-time high this year; Google searches on topics related to anxiety have jumped 52% during the pandemic.

The holidays will be challenging this year.

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Dr. Linda Miles

How do we deal with the challenges of the coronavirus during the holiday season when the number of cases has spiked? How can families remain safe and still find comfort in celebrating holiday traditions? Covid does not mean the end of Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanza, and other winter holidays.

This year brings unique opportunities to practice strategies such as mindfulness to stay

internally calm despite external stressors. Mindfulness is a science-based practice that encourages breathing deeply while focusing on the present moment.

As a psychotherapist, I am working with a family composed of two working-from-home parents who are raising three young children. They asked for help because they felt their marriage was unraveling under the pressure. I gave the mindfulness practices to tame their inner storms, which has helped diminish their verbal attacks on one another or the children.

Here are a handful of mindfulness practices that can help families share special moments during the holidays amid today's unprecedented challenges:

- **Choose now.** By mindfully living in the present, you can make the conscious decision to focus your resources and time on positive emotions of joy, appreciation, and healing. This does not mean that you're denying the reality of inconveniences or suffering that may affect you, your family, or your community. Instead, it means that you actively choose to find moments during the day to share and partake in kindness, gratitude, and joy.
- **Practice the art of rejoicing.** Eric Kandel, a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Medicine, notes that the ability to rejoice is not something that we are born with or without; it's something that can and should be cultivated constantly. He has observed that we can train our brains to resist harmful gut reactions and strengthen our ability to focus on positive aspects and feelings that serve us and those around us.
- **Take Time Out.** There is a humorous commercial about a woman who walks into chaos in her living room during the holidays and enters into chaos in her living room. She quietly closes the door on the bedlam and returns to her car to sit and calm down. It is important to have quiet times to take time-outs. You can sit in your car, take a slow walk and focus on nature or find a quiet place to sit or lie down. If you are outside, allow your senses to see, hear, smell and touch your surroundings.
- **Use healing Imagery.** In the midst of an anxiety-producing event, practice mindfulness techniques to evoke calmness and healing. Imagine that you inhale sparks of goodness and healing, and that you breathe out some of that light and healing to others. When you notice tension building up in your body, breathe deeply and fill your body with clean air and thoughts. Envision a healing light that penetrates your muscles and soothes them.

MINDFUL REMINDERS:

- **Accept reality.** It does not help to deny what is happening. Focus, however, on the things you have control over.
- **Remember that every challenge is an opportunity in disguise.** The challenge of the coronavirus is an opportunity to become better instead of bitter. Take it one day at a time. You do not know

the future. Give your best today. Use this situation as an experiment in staying in the present moment.

- The challenge of the coronavirus is also an opportunity to become better by helping others. When we help others, we feel better ourselves.
- Wasteful worrying will not change the present or future. Now is a good time to practice choosing peace of mind instead of fear. Life feels different if your heart is not obstructed by fear.
- Realize that gratitude and an expression of appreciation are not just for good times; gratitude is cathartic and healing in troublesome times.
- You cannot avoid suffering, but you can intentionally look for joy amidst suffering. Joseph Campbell said that one of the most important lessons is to "find joy amidst suffering." Emotions are contagious, so ignite your own inner light.
- Mindful breathing always helps. Inhale and think the word "Be"; think the word "Calm" as you exhale.
- Notice the stories you tell yourself about what might happen, and realize that those are only stories.
- Anne Frank said: "Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy." Joy does not imply never-ending happiness.

With compassion, patience, and mindfulness, we will continue to celebrate life and one another despite all the challenges we face. In such uncertain times, it's imperative to listen to the experts and follow their instructions to ensure that we emerge safe, healthy, and alive—with our loved ones just as intact. Above all, it's important to face uncertainty and fear with the only thing that's guaranteed to make today and tomorrow better: loving kindness toward ourselves, our loved ones, and society as a whole.

Dr. Miles has a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology and has worked as a psychotherapist for 35 years. Her first book, *The New Marriage*, written with her husband, Robert Miles, M.D., won a literary prize as a finalist for Forward Non-fiction Book of the Year. She has published books on relationships and mindfulness, as well as articles in the *Wall Street Journal*. She has been a guest on numerous national TV shows including Fox News, CNN and ABC.

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