

MHA NEWSLETTER



WHAT IS A BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE?

Blue? Yes, blue as in "I am feeling blue." For many people, the approaching holidays do not bring with them the joy and happiness that is advertised on television or in greeting cards. Not everyone is up and cheery around Christmas or other holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, struggling with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, coping with year-round depression or anxiety, and a number of other human situations can make holiday parties and joviality painful for many people in the community. There is a growing attentiveness to the needs of people who are emotionally "blue" at Christmas. Increasing numbers of churches, Christian as well as inter-faith, are creating space, especially during the holiday season,

for people living through dark times. Blue Christmas services are reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope.

Some churches hold a service of worship on the longest night of the year, which falls on or about December 21st, the Winter Solstice. Blue Christmas services include an emphasis on candles, with people in the congregation invited to come forward and light a candle in memory of someone or to mark an event in their lives. Some will say words out loud, others in silent prayer. The format of the service often varies depending on the faith, denomination and church leadership, so don't be afraid to reach out ahead of time if you have any questions.

Taken in parts from: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmaslongest-night-worship-with-those-who-mourn> "Blue Christmas/Longest Night Worship With Those Who Mourn" by Daniel Benedict and <https://web.archive.org/web/20141116100656/http://macucc.prod.brickriver.com/ucnews/dec04/BlueChristmas.htm> "Blue Christmas Services Are a Comfort to Many" by Tiffany Vail

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LOCAL "BLUE CHRISTMAS" SERVICES

Christ Community Church and Grace & Holy Spirit Church (Christ Community Church on Tompkins Street (1093 Hwy 13 - "GPS) Will offer it's Blue Christmas service on: **Wednesday, December 21 at 7:00 PM.**

Homer Avenue United Methodist Church (Homer United Methodist Church, 30 Homer Avenue) Will offer it's Blue Christmas service on: **Saturday, December 17 at 7:00 PM.**

Blue Christmas not only recognizes those who mourn lost loved ones during the holidays, but those feeling sadness at other losses - marriage break-UPS, family members stationed overseas, job loss or even loss of health.

BEAT THE HOLIDAY BLUES — AND KNOW WHEN THEY'RE SOMETHING MAJOR

A variety of factors can lead to the holiday blues, but it's also important to know when symptoms are a sign of major depression or anxiety.

Although the holidays are a time of joy for many, they can also trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression to different degrees. There are several reasons people may experience symptoms of anxiety or depression over the holidays. Symptoms may indicate the "holiday blues" or be signs of a more serious major depression.

Common causes of the holiday blues include:

Increased alcohol use — It is common during the holiday period for people to celebrate. Unfortunately, a certain percentage may drink too much. Alcoholism is also a disorder that commonly occurs with depression. Limit your drinking and remember that it is okay if you don't feel festive. Accept your inner experience and do not force yourself to express specific feelings.

Overeating — Obesity is a major American problem. During the holidays, there is a tendency for all of us to eat too much, which can lead us to feel worse about our body image and ourselves.

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App(s) of the Month: Pacifica

Stress, anxiety, and depression can get in the way of you living your life. Pacifica gives you holistic tools to address it based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness, relaxation, and health.

Stress, anxiety, and depression are caused by an ongoing cycle of thoughts. Thoughts cause physical feelings which cause actions. Pacifica attempts to break this cycle using tools that target each of its components. Day-by-day, you'll learn to manage stress, anxiety and depression at your own pace. We're not about quick-fixes or false promises. We are about real progress, a day at a time.

iPhone: <http://apple.co/2fT4sgi>

Android: <http://bit.ly/2fdSoq2>



...Beat the holiday blues — and know when they're something major continued

Lack of sleep — It is not uncommon for people to spend more time celebrating, meeting people and going out. Unfortunately, decreased sleep is a major contributor to feeling tired and lethargic during the day, and may contribute to increased rates of depressive symptoms. It is important during the holiday period to try to develop healthier sleep habits.

Overscheduling — There is sometimes a desire to meet with as many people as possible that we have not been able to see during the year. This results in a packed schedule. Frequently, we will feel rushed and burdened by the need to interact with so many over such a short period. Don't overbook yourself. Try to limit the number of interactions and think carefully about who you wish to meet.

Lack of planning — It is not uncommon to see people running around malls at the last minute because they delayed purchasing gifts. This adds a great deal of stress and contributes to holiday blues.

Unrealistic expectations about ourselves — During the holidays, we frequently meet other people that are quite successful and are advancing throughout their careers. This may lead us to place unrealistic expectations on ourselves concerning our own accomplishments, or our perceived lack of them. None of us is perfect, and sometimes we develop unrealistic expectations over the holidays of what we should accomplish and focus our failures. Be realistic in what you seek to achieve, both personally and professionally. Don't label the holidays as a time to cure all past problems. The holidays do not prevent sadness or loneliness.

Unrealistic fantasies about our families — Frequently during the holiday season, we will see movies that picture "the wonderful life," exemplified by "perfect" families, Hales said. Unrealistic expectations that one's own family should meet these high standards can be quite depressing. Try to be realistic and emphasize your family's strengths rather than weaknesses.

Lack of exercise — Because of frequent rain, people often exercise less during the holidays. Exercise is a known preventive activity for depressive symptoms, and decreasing the amount of a regular exercise can worsen symptoms.

Lack of time for oneself — A major focus of the holidays is providing things for other people or looking after them. We frequently neglect ourselves during this time. This externalization of efforts can deplete your reserves and worsen symptoms of anxiety or depression. Practice self-care and look out for yourself during the

holiday period. The holidays are a wonderful period to reflect, reassess and make plans for the future.

Tell people about your needs if you have recently experienced a **tragedy, death, or romantic break-up**.

Holiday blues vs. depressive disorder

Major depression can destroy joy for living and make it impossible to focus on work and responsibilities. Individuals may experience hopelessness and depressive symptoms such as sadness and tearfulness throughout the day. Thoughts of death or suicide may enter their minds.

Depression is the world's most common mental ailment, affecting approximately 16 percent of adults at some point in their lives. Stress-related events such as the holidays may trigger half of all depressive episodes, Hales said.

There are various forms of anxiety. About 10 million adults in the United States suffer from a generalized anxiety disorder, which is an excessive or unrealistic apprehension that causes physical symptoms and last for six months or longer.

Since the holidays may be a period where people experience increased depression or anxiety symptoms, it is important to recognize the signs of major depression. If during the holidays you experience many of the below symptoms to such severity that they interfere with your normal relationships, it is important to seek help from your primary care physician:

- feeling depressed, sad and discouraged
- loss of interest in once-pleasurable and enjoyable activities
- eating more or less than usual, or gaining or losing weight
- having trouble sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- feeling slow or restless
- lack of energy
- feeling hopeless, helpless, or inadequate
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty thinking clearly or making decisions
- persistent thoughts of death or suicide
- withdrawal from others and lack of interest in sex
- various physical symptoms.

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, seek support from your primary care provider. If you are experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis, call the **24-hour Cortland County Crisis Line at 607-756-3771** or visit your nearest Emergency Room.

Taken from http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/welcome/features/20081217_holiday_blues/



We are a volunteer Board of Directors that act to initiate and promote advocacy services, educational presentations, prevention programs, and information and resource referrals.

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WHY IS POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV?

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. When you have positive mental health, you generally are able to:

- function better at work, at school, and in relationships.
- cope more effectively with life's difficulties, such as the death of a loved one, ending a relationship, job stress, health issues, and family or financial problems.
- take better care of yourself physically.
- provide better care for your children or other family members.

But mental health problems can affect the way you think, feel, and behave, and can change how well you function at work and at home. If you are living with HIV, mental health problems can affect your physical health by:

- making it harder for you to take all your HIV medicines on time.
- making it harder for you to keep your health appointments or take advantage of your support network.
- interfering with your healthy behaviors, such as getting enough sleep and exercise and avoiding risk behaviors such as having unprotected sex.

- impairing your ability to cope with the stresses of daily life.

Mental health problems are very common among all Americans, not just those living with HIV. In fact, in 2012, about:

- One in five American adults experienced a diagnosable mental illness.
- Nearly one in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression.
- Four percent of American adults lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

As a person living with HIV, it is important for you to be aware that you have an increased risk for developing mood, anxiety, and cognitive disorders. These conditions are treatable. People who experience mental health problems can get better and many recover completely. You can better manage your overall health and well-being if you know how having HIV can affect your mental health and what resources are available to help you if you need it.



Starting antiretroviral therapy also can affect your mental health in different ways. Sometimes, it can relieve your anxiety because knowing that you are taking care of yourself can give you a sense of security. However, it can also increase your emotions because coping with the reality of living with HIV can be complicated. In addition, antiretroviral medications may cause a variety of symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance, and may make some mental health issues worse.

The HIV virus itself also can contribute to mental health problems. Some opportunistic infections (which occur when your immune system is damaged by HIV) can affect your nervous system and lead to changes in your behavior and functioning. Other disorders, such as mild cognitive changes or more severe cognitive conditions, such as dementia, are associated with advanced HIV disease.

For these reasons, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider about your mental health. A conversation about mental health should be part of your complete medical evaluation before starting antiretroviral medications. And you should continue to discuss your mental health with your healthcare team throughout treatment. Be open and honest with your provider about any changes in the way you are thinking, or how you are feeling about yourself and life in general. Also discuss any alcohol or substance use with your provider so that he or she can help connect you to treatment if necessary.



PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV ARE AT INCREASED RISK FOR DEVELOPING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS. THESE CONDITIONS ARE TREATABLE AND, WITH HELP, YOU CAN RECOVER.

In addition, tell your healthcare provider about any over-the-counter or prescribed medications you may be taking, including any psychiatric medications, because some of these drugs may interact with antiretroviral medications. And if you are already seeing or plan to see a mental health counselor, sharing your HIV status will be a valuable piece of information about yourself that can contribute to discussion of overall self-care that is inevitably a part of behavioral healthcare. For more information on living with HIV/AIDS contact **Southern Tier AIDS Program (STAP) at 800-333-0892**. STAP has offices in Binghamton and Ithaca

with many resources for individuals living with HIV.

Taken in part from: <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/staying-healthy-with-hiv-aids/taking-care-of-yourself/mental-health/>



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Addressee

Questions, comments, or feed-back on the MHA Newsletter?
We appreciate your thoughts!

EMAIL OPTION:

If you'd like to receive the MHA Newsletter electronically in color as a PDF, please send your full name and email to:
erin@sevenvalleyshealth.org

Community Events & Support

Ongoing Bereavement Programs - Cortland Hospicare Office:

11 Kennedy Parkway, Cortland, NY

Groups facilitated by bereavement counselors at three different times in Cortland. Open to all people 18 or older, regardless of when the loss occurred or whether your deceased loved one received hospice services. Prompt arrival is appreciated. Registration is not required, but if this will be your first time participating, please contact Donna George, LMSW, FT, at 607-272-0212 or dgeorge@hospicare.org.

Morning Support Group for All Bereaved 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
December 6

Afternoon Support Group for All Bereaved Noon – 1:30 p.m.
December 15

This year the Hospice Foundation of Cortland County will also hold its annual Light of My Life Memory Tree on Friday, December 2 at 6:30pm at the Homer Village Green. For more information, visit www.cortlandlightofmylife.org.

Cortland LGBT Men's Group (Monthly)

- Where: Cortland LGBT Resource Ctr, 73 Main St.

- Contact: (607) 756-8970

Parents & Change Support Group (Monthly)

- When: Nov 14 | Dec 12 from 6:00 to 7:30 PM

- Where: 90 Central Avenue

- Contact: Beckey Trippp (parentsandchange@yahoo.com)

Caregivers Support Group (Monthly)

- When: 4th Thursday at 12:30 PM

- Where: County Office Bldg (Dining Rm.)

- Contact: The Area Agency on Aging @ (607) 753-5060



If you have an upcoming community event or article you would like considered for admission to the MHA Newsletter, send your submission to ben@sevenvalleyshealth.org by the 7th of the month prior.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.