



“Beating the Holiday Blues”

Ben Gordon Center Offers Free Mental Health Screenings during the Holiday Season

Although the holidays are supposed to be a time full of joy, good cheer and optimistic hopes for a new year, many people experience seasonal "Blues". The holiday season is full of parties and family gatherings, but for many people it is also a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past "Failures" and anxiety about an uncertain year. Said Michael Flora, President and CEO of the Ben Gordon Center.

The "Holiday Blues" can be caused by many factors: Increased stress and fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization and the inability to be with one's family. The increased demands of shopping, parties, family reunions and house guests also contribute to these feelings of tension. Even people who do not become depressed can develop other stress reactions during the holidays such as headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating and difficulty sleeping. "Flora Added.

"Everyone at some point in their lives experiences feelings of sadness, loneliness or the blues. Every day events and how we react can contribute to our overall emotional health and well-being," said Flora. "Each Year 17.6 million Americans will suffer from Depression at any given time, of those 25% of all women and up to 12% of all men in the U.S. will experience a major depressive episode at some time in their lives. Less than half of the people suffering from depression seek treatment for it. One out of every five adults may experience depression at some point during his or her life" Flora added.

The reason many do not seek treatment is due to the stigma associated with receiving any kind of mental health care," said Flora. Mental illness is a disease like any other. It is treatable and treatment does work. Depression, like any of the other illnesses is a chemical imbalance in the brain. Depression or anxiety or other mental illness is not a sign of weakness. An individual cannot just will depression away. Treatment is necessary. At the Ben Gordon Center, we have physicians,

nurses, psychologists, counselors and social workers on staff to assist the family and the individual in a confidential and caring professional manner.

To help, the Ben Gordon Center is offering free mental health screenings on line at www.bengordoncenter.org or any day during regular business hours Monday through Friday 8:30 am to 5:00 PM on a walk in basis. No appointment is needed. Individuals will have an opportunity to take the free screening and speak with a mental health professional. If needed the individual can also seek services with one of the Ben Gordon Center's team of caring professionals.

The Ben Gordon Center is also offering a free Holiday survival guide on line at www.bengordoncenter.org.

Treatment for depression consists of medications and counseling. The combination of both of these treatment modalities yield an 80-90% recovery rate. The average number of counseling sessions is 6-8 nationally.

Recently the surgeon general has stated that suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in the United States. Each year over 30,000 people commit suicide. Suicides account for only 1% of all deaths. It should be noted that the majority of persons who commit suicide are not in treatment at the time of their death. One way we can prevent suicides in our community is early recognition and treatment for depression and other psychiatric illness. The highest rate of suicides were men over 85 who have a rate of 65.3/100,000, males are four more times likely to die of suicide than females. This is due again to the stigma of receiving mental health services. Women take better care of themselves", said Flora, "men seem to view mental health services a sign of personal weakness" This is myth. Depression is an illness. If you or someone you love is thinking about suicide they should talk to a mental health professional immediately. Services are available 24 hours a day seven days a week said Flora. The Ben Gordon Center provides emergency and after hours mental health and substance abuse services for our community assist individuals and families in crisis. A counselor is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week by calling 1-866-BGC-0111

Another myth about depression is that it is a part of the aging process. This is not true. Depression can happen at any age. offers Treatment services specially oriented for senior citizens related to depression, coping with grief and loss as well as many other emotional illnesses.

"Many factors that appear to contribute to depression are common to both men and women. No one thing causes depression. What we do know is that if someone has a close relative who suffers from depression they are more likely to also have the disease. Children, parents and siblings of a depressed person have about a 15% chance of developing depression themselves. People without close relatives with depression have a 2% to 3% chance of developing depression"

We also know that that depression is that research has shown us that it is associated with a chemical imbalance in our brains. This chemical imbalance is a lack of serotonin, our brains own antidepressant. This imbalance or disruption in the important chemicals called neurotransmitters.

The new medications are very effective in the treatment of depression Said Flora.

The term depression is used to refer to a common medical condition with very specific symptoms. These symptoms can include:

- Feelings of sadness
- Loss of interest and /or pleasure in once enjoyed activities
- Changes in sleep, appetite or weight
- Irritability
- Withdrawal
- Feelings of fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness
- Thoughts or feelings of suicide

If individuals experience feelings of sadness or loss of interest plus four or more of the other symptoms for two weeks or more, they could be suffering from clinical depression said Flora

Women are vulnerable to depression due to varied factors unique to women's lives are suspected to contribute to depression-- developmental. Reproductive, hormonal, genetic and other biological factors; abuse and oppression; interpersonal factors; and certain psychological and personality characteristics.

There is evidence that children who experience early losses of important people, especially parents, may be more likely to develop depression later in life. Relationship difficulties, communication problems, and conflicts with co-worker or others may also contribute to loneliness, alienation and subsequent depression. Financial difficulties and other life stressors may also have a strong impact. Regardless of contributing factors, depression is a highly treatable illness and there are types of treatment available that are effective.

Although, many people become depressed during the holiday season, even more respond to the excessive stress and anxiety once the holidays have passed. This post-holiday letdown after January 1 can be the result of emotional disappointments experienced during the preceding months as well as physical reactions caused by excess fatigue and stress.

There are ways to identify potential sources of holiday depression that can help individuals cope with the seasonal blues,

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable by not trying to make this the best holiday ever. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the most important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not spend too much time preparing for just one day.
- Remember that the holiday season does not automatically banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely: there is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.

- Let go of the past. Don't be disappointed if your holidays are not like they used to be. Life brings changes. Each holiday season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. You set yourself up for sadness if everything has to be just like "the good old days". Look toward the future.
- Do something for someone else. It is an old remedy but it can help. Try volunteering some time to help others
- Enjoy holiday activities that are free such as driving around to look at the holiday decorations. Go window shopping without buying anything.
- Don't drink too much. Excessive drinking will only make you more depressed. Alcohol is a depressant and should be avoided if at all possible.
- Don't be afraid to try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a way you have never done before.
- Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Make new friends if you are alone during special times. Contact someone you have lost contact with.
- Find time for yourself! Don't spend all your time providing activities for your family or friends.

Recent studies have shown that there are also environmental factors which can contribute to the feelings of depression around the holidays. Some people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which can result from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months. Researchers have found, however, that photo therapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense ultra violet light, is effective in relieving depression symptoms in patients with SAD. Common Signals of SAD are:

- A change in Sleep Patterns
- Extreme fatigue and drop in energy levels(slow, sluggish, lethargic movements)
- Decreased creativity and concentration
- Carbohydrate craving and increased appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Reduction in Sex Drive
- Feeling of depression, restlessness, irritability, anxiety or boredom

Other studies on the benefits of photo therapy found exposure to early morning sunlight was effective in relieving seasonal depression. Recent findings, however suggest that patients respond equally well to photo therapy in combination with medications and counseling.

It is important that individuals seek an assessment from a mental health professional before any form of treatment is conducted. Ben Gordon Center offers mental health, substance abuse and recovery services for adults, children and families in our community.

Ben Gordon Center offers mental health and recovery services for adults and families in our community. Ben Gordon Center offers services on a sliding fee for those who qualify. Ben Gordon

Center Inc also accepts Medicaid, Medicare, and all Insurance Plans. The Ben Gordon Center is fully accredited by JCAHO, Office of Mental Health and the Office of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services.

Ben Gordon Center is an experienced provider of behavioral health services including older adults. Ben Gordon Center Inc offers services in DeKalb County.

For more information about the Free Mental Health Screenings, Mental health, and substance abuse or about Family or individual counseling call the Ben Gordon Center at....

815-756-4875

Or visit our Website at www.bengordoncenter.org