

Family Life.. First Christmas without my Mother

Situation:

Last Saturday after I pulled some boxes of holiday decorations from the attic, I found myself sitting in the living room staring at the “mess” and found that I was feeling really down. Part of me wants to decorate and another part of me says, “Who cares! It’s too much work. Nobody appreciates it anyway.” I can’t seem to get into the spirit of things.

This is the first Christmas since my Mother passed away, and we were close. Holiday family gatherings have been at my house for about the last 7 years. They used to be at Mother’s house but then all the cooking and baking got to be too much for her to handle, so I gladly took it on. In the past I would always fix things up really nice. My sisters would bring over some of our traditional favorite foods and ooh and ahh at all my handiwork. It was a joy. I was happy to do it. It felt good. It’s not that way this year.

Symptoms:

Because I’ve had problems with depression in the past, I’m scared that this “I don’t care about things” mood is going to linger on, long after the holidays have passed. Is this the beginning of a long downward spiral for me?

My sister Jane seems to be her old bubbly self. I talked to her just the other day and she was all excited about the gifts she bought for her first grandchild and the neighborhood party that she and her husband were going to. Mom not being here, doesn’t seem to bother her at all. What’s wrong with me?

Solution:

After about fifteen minutes of sitting and staring into space, I decided I needed to do something to help myself. Feeling down, is for me, a good indication that I need to stop and think about what I’m thinking.

I’m missing Mom right now this minute. It’s average to miss Mom more at some times and less at other times. I am not wrong, I am average. It’s OK to feel sad about the fact that Mom won’t be with us this year. Millions of people are go through the same thing, facing the first holiday dinner without a loved one. It may be distressing, upsetting, unsettling, but there really is no danger to it at all. I’ve learned that you can’t be comfortable in an uncomfortable situation, and I’m going to rate these holidays as potentially uncomfortable at times.

I recognized that I was a little angry at Jane because it seemed to me that she didn’t miss Mom as much as I did. I told myself that when I was talking to her the other day she wasn’t missing Mom that particular minute. Her mind and her conversation were on her new granddaughter. Jane’s not wrong, she’s average. I can remember other conversations when Jane and I both cried about Mom not being with us anymore.



As for my thoughts about my low feelings turning into a long-lasting full blown depressive state, first I told myself that I didn't know if it would. It may, or it may not. I know that right now I have to be more conscious of my mental health and I'm very, very fortunate that I have verbal tranquilizers to use, when other people in the same situation don't have a clue what to do to help themselves. As much as I want everything to be nice for the family dinner, my mental health comes first. And that's not selfish, it's realistic.

I made a firm decision to do some decorating and even though I still didn't feel like it, I commanded my muscles to move, take the stuff out and put it around the house. When I finished a couple of hours later, I noticed that even though I didn't feel great, I felt better than I would have if I had just sat around.

In the past:

Before I would have talked myself into an even lower mood. I would have complained to my husband about how bad I was feeling. In fact I probably would have called a friend and wasted precious time and energy talking to her about how bad I felt, never knowing that I was actually working myself up. This time I put my time and energy to good use, first in consciously changing my thoughts, then in deliberately moving my muscles.

