Managing Mental Health During the Holidays: A Resource Offering

Whatever the individual reasons, many people's mental health suffers during the holidays. We offer this collection of resources as a holiday gift to our beloved community.

December 13, 2024 By The Well Project

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Whatever the individual reasons, whether the cold of winter in the northern hemisphere or the stress of this so-called festive season, many people's mental health suffers during the holidays. Further, studies show that women in the general population are already twice as likely as men to experience depression, and women living with HIV across the gender spectrum are more likely to experience mental health challenges than those women. While these statistics are stark, they can also be reminders that women living with HIV and managing their mental health are not alone.

The Well Project has a rich collection of resources about mental health, tailored for women living with HIV. Members of our community have also used our website to speak, write, and consult with other experts about mental health concerns and how they respond.

We offer this roundup of classic resources, curated by editorial director Olivia G. Ford, as a holiday gift to our beloved community. We hope you will make The Well Project a part of your support system, in this season and throughout the year.

Yours,
The Well Project Team

Tips and Activities

Coping with Mental Health around the Holidays

The 25th episode of A Girl Like Me LIVE was a candid, vulnerable conversation with host Ciarra "Ci Ci" Covin and community advisory board members Heather O'Connor and Masonia Traylor, exploring ways to manage depression, anxiety, finances, family responsibilities, and other stressors during the holidays.

Sharing the Journey from Stigma to Mindfulness

Louise Vallace, founder of Aunty Lou’s House and a community advisory board member and blogger with The Well Project, became a practitioner of mindfulness meditation and yoga following

her HIV diagnosis. Louise guides listeners through a mindfulness session, and shares how these practices changed her life, in a video version of her presentation on the topic from the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2024) in Munich, Germany.

Read about Louise's yoga practice and its benefits: How Yoga Helps Me, by Aunty Lou's House on A Girl Like Me

Combating Loneliness and Isolation with HIV: Building A Village

In this episode of A Girl Like Me LIVE, The Well Project's stakeholder liaison, Bridgette Picou, LVN, ACLPN, was joined by long-time The Well Project collaborator and fierce advocate, Gina Brown, RSW, to discuss different types of loneliness, factors unique to women that can increase these feelings, and the importance of building community.

ART Therapy

“Call it a brain break, a spiritual separation, or an emotional escape—I’ve learned they are critical to mental health,” writes The Well Project’s Bridgette Picou (blogging as Red40something) of the release she finds in painting, making jewelry, and other forms of creativity. “I hope you find art in your life. Don’t be scared to try something new. It doesn’t have to be perfect to be just right. If not art, some hobby or venture that allows you to be in a moment that is not tied to HIV, or responsibility to anyone but yourself.”

Stay Well at Home with The Well Project

In April 2020, in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Well Project launched Stay Well at Home to foster engagement and activity amid the extraordinary and challenging times we found ourselves in. This bi-weekly video/chat series featured women living with HIV sharing their own

skills and passions with their community. Sessions included vision planning, exercise, cooking, natural skin care, writing, nutrition, and more – providing us with ways to stay connected to each other while taking a collective mental health break.

View all 14 sessions of Stay Well at Home

Perspectives

Winter Has Me Over It, but in a New Way...

“Changing our mindset to use the winter months as literal rest and mental hibernation gives us the emotional and physical strength to emerge as the HIV leaders and empowered consumers we are in the New Spring,” writes blogger arnoldmom.

I Almost Forgot

Blogger Destiny Smith reflects on balancing her love of the holidays with the anniversary of her HIV diagnosis during this season.

Mental Illness, It’s Not in My Head

“I wish I could tell you how to overcome depression and burnout, but I haven’t figured that out myself,” writes blogger and community advisory board member Katie Willingham. “What I can tell you is that if you experience depression or other mental health symptoms you’re not alone. This is extremely serious, it’s not all in your head, it’s a very real reality for many people, and you don’t have to experience it alone, so don’t give up.”

Read Katie’s account of being estranged from her family of origin during a past holiday season: Back in the Saddle, by KatieAdsila on A Girl Like Me

Family, Friends and HIV - It Takes a Village

Blogger ConnieLJohnson shares her story of being diagnosed with HIV and receiving different kinds of support through connecting with biological, chosen, and advocacy family.

Facts

Stress Management

Learn about common signs and causes of stress, how stress affects women living with HIV, and how to reduce and cope with stress in your life.

Substance Use, Addiction, and HIV

Learn about substance use, how it can affect you, how it relates to HIV, how to tell if you have a problem, and what to do.

Mental and Behavioral Health, Women, and HIV

We can take steps to feel and live better, but individual responses are not the whole story when it comes to health. Learn more about factors affecting mental and behavioral health for women living with HIV.

Physical Activity, Exercise, and HIV

Learn about physical activity and exercise – what they are and how much you need to stay healthy. Also get low-tech tips on how to get moving!

From Our Partners

- Hopeless for the Holidays? Advice to Help You Cope (POZ)
- What to Do When You're SAD for No Apparent Reason (TheBody)

Additional Resources

- Mental Health and the Holidays: 9 Tips for Self-Care (National Council on Aging)
- Navigating Painful Emotions Around the Holidays (Therapy for Black Girls)
- Coping With Loneliness Around the Holidays (Esther Perel)
- Blending Families for the Holidays (Therapy for Black Girls)
- McLean's Guide to Managing Mental Health Around the Holidays (McLean Hospital)

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, https://www.thewellproject.org/, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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