



## *The Holiday Season: A Mixed Bag of Emotions*

By Michele Owens, LAMFT (Licensed Associate Marriage and Family Therapist)

What emotions come to your mind when you hear the word “holidays”? Are you flooded with a sense of excitement imagining twinkle lights, the first snow and family gatherings? Or are you consumed with feelings of stress, racing thoughts and what-if questions on how you are going to manage getting everything done in time? Perhaps the holidays bring about a great sense of sadness or loss and are an acute reminder of what could have been? Realistically, you may feel all of these things in one form or another this time of year. This season carries with it a large bag of emotions for most of us. How do we manage the ups and downs of the holiday season? Here are a few ways to help carry your own mixed bag of emotions, whatever that may mean for you:

1. **Acknowledge the Bag:** What’s inside your bag of emotions? Happiness, sadness, grief, stress, anxiety, dread, excitement? Take a moment to think about this, acknowledging each of your emotions and how they influence your mood.
2. **Slow Down:** You’ve heard this many times before. Do you have five minutes before you fall asleep, 30 seconds to smile at a stranger, a small break at work to bring yourself back to the present or the time spent in your car? Whenever it is, take the time to slow yourself down, recognize the emotional benefits, and just be.
3. **Give:** When we think of giving during this time of year images of presents often pop into our heads. Beyond this, giving of time, space, and energy are all ways in which the receiver AND giver can fill their emotional bags with positive feelings.
4. **Traditions:** Embrace the traditions you have and create new ones. This can look different for everyone and can be difficult if you are in a time of transition however, traditions provide a sense of stability in one’s life and can reduce stress in an efficacious way.
5. **Gather:** Call up that friend you’ve been meaning to get together with, invite family over for a meal, volunteer, or attend holiday happenings around your town. Connecting with others during the holiday season is a great way to combat feelings of loneliness and provide a sense of fulfillment in a way that is unique to everyone.

Our collection of emotions is ever-changing. This season recognize where you are at, reflect on the events of this past year, and redirect your focus to how you’d like your tote of emotions to influence your life in the New Year.