The Winter Blues

Do you ever feel down in the months following daylight savings? Do you find yourself getting more easily and having less interest in your passions and interests? In this newsletter we are going to explain what some may experience as the winter blues and some criteria for when the winter blues are more significantly impacting your life.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that comes and goes with the seasons, typically starting in the late fall and early winter. It is also possible, but much less common, for SAD to occur in the summer months. For an official SAD diagnosis to be appropriate, these symptoms must be quite severe and frequent.

If you’re experiencing most of these symptoms nearly every day, consider talking with your doctor or therapist to evaluate all your treatment options in addition to trying the suggestions below. If what you’re experiencing is something milder, the following strategies may be enough to help you through the winter.

Mindfulness Moments

Taking a few moments during each day to name one positive can really help over time. What is one thing you accomplished, big or small? What was one thing you enjoyed doing? What are you thankful for right now? If you’re feeling ambitious, try to list as many as you possibly can!
Small Steps Count Too

When we’re feeling overwhelmed, we’re sometimes prone to looking at the whole marathon in front of us. It can feel like we might as well not start because we can’t see how we’ll finish. Setting and achieving small goals can help us get started—even baby steps are steps forward. Make sure when you complete that first task (and every task after it), no matter how small it seems, you really take a moment to acknowledge it. After all, if we put ourselves down each time we accomplish something (“I should have done this sooner. It’s not a big deal.”), why would we want to keep going?

Talking Back to Unhelpful Thoughts

When we’re feeling down or depressed, sometimes unhelpful thoughts happen automatically through no fault of our own. Once they happen, reframing those thoughts or “talking back” to them can help your brain practice new and more helpful ways of thinking. The more we practice, the easier it will be for our brain to think in the new way automatically.

Some questions to consider when thinking of a more helpful thought:

- What is the evidence? Am I making assumptions?
- Is this thought based on facts or feelings?
- Is this thought black and white, when reality is more complicated?
- How might other people interpret this situation? How might they see it?
- Did someone teach me this type of thought? If so, are they a reliable source?
- Am I thinking of the most likely outcome or the worst-case scenario? What are the odds?

Automatic Unhelpful Thought:

- “I’ll never feel better. I’m useless.”
- “I’m such a bad parent/employee/spouse/kid”
- “My friends don’t like me or have time for me.”

Reframed More Helpful Thought:

- “I’m noticing I’m down and that’s okay. Last time I felt down, ______ helped me feel better.”
- “I’m struggling right now, just like a lot of people. I’m glad I was able to ______.”
- “I know my friends love me, but they get busy.”

Artist’s Corner: People are Icebergs

People are similar to icebergs. There are a few things that everyone sees but there is much more that people don’t see that makes us who we are. Complete this iceberg with things about you that people can see and the things they wouldn’t normally know but are important to you. The iceberg completed here represents just one example of how depression can be experienced.