

Myth Busting the Holiday Spike

The holidays are fast approaching, and although this time of year is typically full of fun, good memories, and amazing food—there are some who may be struggling through all of the cheer. For community members who are grieving or displaced at this time, an empty chair at the table can sting. There are also about 3 million Americans each year who experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)—meaning that depressive episodes kick in during fall or winter months and subside when Springtime comes back around. Studies have also found that time constraints, finances and preparation around holiday celebrations create higher levels of stress during fall and winter than at any other point during the year. With all of this in mind, there is a general assumption that the suicide rate also spikes during this time.

Reaper Clean, Fresno's local Biohazard Remediation Specialists, will be on call in the Central Valley throughout Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. They are available 24/7 to respond to and remediate trauma cleaning situations for families during the holiday season. To be clear, the availability is not a response to an increased demand for services during this time, but a mindfulness that the holidays are not a shield against tragedy. In fact, statistics show that this is actually the time of year where the suicide rate is at its lowest.

Despite all of the seemingly negative factors on the rise, experts are leaning towards the narrative that holiday tradition during this time of year positively contributes to suicide prevention. This is due in part to communal ideas about forgiveness, gestures of kindness, reaching out to friends and family, and coming together. Suicide Prevention at its root is about forming a community capable of recognizing warning signs, offering a support system, and creating avenues for healing. Space for intervention emerges during the holiday season because these traditional values intersect with the values of suicide prevention.

Prevention often begins with a difficult, but direct conversation the moment you become worried about a friend or family member who has displayed multiple warning signs related to suicide. November and December are actually great opportunities to have heart-to-heart conversations with loved ones that create space for check-ins with one another. Letting old friends or distant family members know that you still think of them and the memories you've created together, can be accomplished with letters, cards, phone calls, and get togethers. Our willingness to communicate, listen, and being present or available can help those who may be struggling, whether their struggle is obvious or not.

Typically, well-intentioned people simply ask whether there is anything they can do for others who are struggling. Oftentimes, nothing ever becomes of that offer because many people do not know exactly what they need or how to ask for help, but there is a communal tradition of giving back during the holidays that invokes initiative in those who are able. Spontaneously paying for a person's coffee in line, taking time to make meals for others, cleaning up after family gatherings, giving unexpected gifts, surprising friends or family, and many other ways of showing kindness are all commonplace during this time. This also means that people who need support or help, may not have to directly ask for it and still receive what they need.

Inviting friends and family to attend gatherings where they are welcome, without pressure, also creates a safe space for anyone having a hard time. Being invited offers support, and no pressure means less guilt if they cannot attend while still feeling supported. Also, being flexible instead of harshly sticking to

the exact date of a holiday can help open up schedules for working or on-call family members and multiple gatherings, so that everyone can have an opportunity to participate.

It is also okay to set boundaries, not attend an event or go no-contact with toxic people in order to maintain one's mental health. Boundaries can be hard to uphold this time of year when ideas of forgiveness or reconnecting are so heightened—in which case, a good support system is very important to fall back on.

This sense of communal feeling is likely leading people to reach out more, whether for help or to help, and this is what effective suicide prevention is all about.

For more information about Reaper Clean, go to www.reaperclean.com, email onthescene@reaperclean.com, or follow on Facebook, Instagram, or Tiktok @reaper_clean.