

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services Offers Guidance on Holiday Blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder**

**Stockton, CA** — As the winter season arrives, many residents look forward to celebrations, family gatherings and time to reflect. Yet for others—especially those managing mental health conditions, substance use recovery, or seasonal affective disorder (SAD)—the holidays can intensify feelings of stress, loneliness, or emotional fatigue.

National estimates show that the holiday season can worsen symptoms for many people living with mental health challenges. San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services (BHS) encourages residents to recognize early signs of stress and take proactive steps to protect their well-being.

“Each year we see how emotional pressure, shorter days, and expectations around the holidays can weigh heavily on people,” said Fay Vieira, Director of BHS. “No one should feel like they have to navigate those feelings alone. Support is available, and reaching out is a sign of strength.”

Shorter daylight hours can contribute to SAD—a form of depression connected to changes in sunlight exposure. Combined with holiday demands, this can heighten anxiety, cravings, or isolation, especially for individuals in recovery or receiving ongoing mental health care.

Vieira emphasized the importance of planning ahead: “Knowing what affects you—whether it’s certain environments, conversations, or simply exhaustion—can help you set healthy boundaries,” she said. “Give yourself permission to prioritize rest, stability, and the routines that support your recovery and mental health.”

**Tips for Supporting Mental Health This Holiday Season**

- Understand your triggers. If you are in recovery, avoid situations where alcohol or drugs are present or where past use took place. For those living with mental health conditions, notice when crowds, conflict, or overstimulation increase symptoms and set limits accordingly.
- Practice intentional self-care. It’s okay to decline invitations, step outside for a break, or schedule downtime. Choose environments and people who support your well-being.
- Move your body and calm your mind. Light exercise, stretching, or meditation can ease stress and lift moods—especially helpful during shorter winter days.

- Stay connected. Feelings of loneliness often increase during the holidays. Reach out through a call, video chat, or message. Checking in with others also builds a sense of community.
- Eat balanced meals, drink plenty of water, and avoid overindulgence can help stabilize mood and energy levels.
- Focus on what matters most. Reflecting on gratitude, acts of kindness, and manageable expectations can help ease emotional strain.

BHS provides around-the-clock support for individuals and families needing someone to talk to or seeking professional help. Support services include:

- 24/7 Crisis Line: 209-468-8686 Counseling, crisis support, and warmline services for individuals and families
- Non-Urgent Behavioral Health Services: 209-468-9370 1212 N. California St., Stockton, CA
- Walk-In Support: 1212 N. California Street, Stockton, CA

“If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach out,” Vieira added. “There is hope, there is help, and our community is here for you.”

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