

25 “Harmless” Comments That Actually Hurt People with Mental Illness Around the Holidays, by Renee Collett, published online in [The Mighty](#) on December 10, 2018

Oh, the holidays. It’s the season of giving, holiday parties, celebrations for the New Year, spending time with family and friends - and the seemingly inevitable and unwelcome comments from people that feel like a punch in the gut.

The holiday season can be just as stressful as it is merry, especially for those who live with a mental illness. Gathering together with people who don’t understand mental health can be incredibly frustrating. Although harm may not be intentional, the conversations you have during this time can be filled with triggering comments, making the holidays even more difficult to get through.

While we cannot control the hurtful comments made by others, we can support each other by acknowledging and validating just how painful their words can be. Though the holidays often mean parties, celebrations, and vacations, mental illnesses don’t always take a break.

We wanted to know what sometimes innocent, but potentially harmful, comments people say to those living with a mental illness around the holidays, so we asked our mental health community to share their experiences. Yes - the holidays can be a joyful time of year, but it’s completely OK to not be OK. Your mental health still matters and you’re not alone.

Here’s what our community had to say:

1. **“Everybody gets depressed.”** It negates the depth of the struggle and fails to recognize the difference between depression and situational sadness. - Shannon R.
2. **“Let it go and just enjoy the season. Practice gratitude and mindfulness.”** If it were that easy, wouldn’t depression and suicide be a non-issue? - Denise N.
3. **“It doesn’t matter that you don’t really have a family. You’ve married into one and made your own.”** Holidays are a time of family and togetherness. While I’m grateful for what I have, I mourn not having grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, etc. I feel immense guilt for feeling sorrowful when people say this to me because I do have in-laws and my own children, but that hole will unfortunately remain. - Heather M.
4. **“Can’t you just stop thinking so negative and be happy. It’s Christmas.”** No, I can’t just magically shut off my brain. - Janey C.
5. **“You’re looking so healthy!”** This is translated by my eating disorder as, “You’ve gained weight.” - Mira K.
6. **“Be happy with what you have.”** I’m not happy on a daily basis. I’m not going to be happy during the holidays when it’s the worst time of the year. - Alicia E.
7. **“Why don’t you smile and be happy?”** It hurts because I can’t just turn on a switch and be happy. I mean, I struggle a lot and especially during the holidays and end of year time. - Hollie M.
8. **“It’s the happiest time of the year!”** I love Christmas, but it doesn’t change everything that I go through. My chronic pain, anxiety, and PTSD doesn’t go away because it’s the holidays. - Liz Ann T.
9. **“Oh, you’ll have a great time at home!”** I dread going home for the holidays. That’s why I live abroad and rarely contact my family, because I love them, but spending too much time with them is bad for my mental health. - Sabine R.

(Cont’d)

10. **"You have power to control your mind; you can stop it without any medication or therapy."** This hurts the most because I actually listen to them, I don't take any medicine and I've never stepped a foot in the therapist's office. Still waiting for that day where, "I can control this." - Tabetha R.
11. **"Look at all the lights. Listen to all the music. How can you be sad with all this joy around?"** - Elizabeth C.
12. **"Did you take your meds? You don't seem joyful."** Just because I take meds for my anxiety doesn't mean they automatically make happy and cheerful. - Katie G.
13. **"Winter/Christmas is your favorite time of the year, you shouldn't be sad!"** Oh, OK, got it! - Heather M.
14. **"We're going back home to visit family for the holidays."** It's a completely harmless comment and they have no idea, but it cuts deep when you know you'll never be doing that same thing due to mental illness with you and your family back home. - Vanessa M.
15. **"You have so much to be happy about, everyone gets depressed and there are people who have it worse, you're being dramatic."** - Danielle W.
16. **"Don't let it get to you"** or **"Don't let it ruin your day."** Cheers, so it's my fault you can't stop yourself from saying insensitive things about me and it's my fault that it gets to me. All I needed right there to enjoy Christmas is pure unfiltered blame. It really destroys me when that happens, so it's my fault if I get upset and something you said even though you know it would upset me or worse trigger me. - Callum C.
17. **"I'm going to have to go for a run to burn that off."** When dealing with an eating disorder, hearing comments about calories or exercise is extremely triggering. - Beth S.
18. **"It's just in your head, so it's easy to get rid of."** This is all year, though, but this hurts because I thought people were smarter than this. Why would it be easier to get rid of when it's "just in my head?" - Cornelia H.
19. **"Are you coming?"** This hurts because I know in my depressed mind, I can't and the feelings of loneliness and emptiness prevail making me feel worse. - Bell R.
20. **"Calm down."** Just because I'm with my family and the people I love the most doesn't mean I'm not anxious. - Morgan C.
21. **"You're so quiet."** Maybe that's because I really don't want to be here and you're just making it that much more awkward and worse. - Alyssa B.
22. **"Just try to be happy. Be in a good mood. Don't complain today."** People think you can just turn your illness on/off for holidays or special occasions like it's no big deal. - Allison M.
23. **"I'm sure it's not easy, but is it really debilitating?"** - Dee F.
24. This comment comes from my own parents. I say I'm tired around this time of year and they usually respond with, **"You're always tired,"** like all I need is a nap. We've had the depression talk before, but I just pretty much lie to them and say, "I'm fine," because I can't explain myself anymore. - Rian T.
25. **"Take your meds and smile like the rest of us. Did you take your meds? You need to eat more. You'd look nicer if you smiled."** - Raven M.