

PECAN PIE FOR ONE?

THE HOLIDAYS CAN PLACE UNDUE PRESSURE ON THE NEED TO GATHER, SO FEAST ON THESE EXPERT TIPS ON FINDING THE JOY IN RIDING SOLO THIS SEASON

BY LAILA ELISE



While the holidays tend to be the time of year when people gather most frequently, this season may also seem like the loneliest time of year for many of us. The societal pressure to belong to a group, or to be settled down with family, can seem as exaggerated and overplayed as the 4 a.m. Black Friday blowout sales that go along with the season – leaving many of us feeling a bit more reclusive and lonesome than usual. The truth is, however, that there's nothing wrong with being alone or feeling lonely among a group of people; it's a natural part of the human condition. Here are some expert tips for those of us who'll be setting the table for one this year.

Take the Time to Focus on Your Personal Needs

Daniel Marston, Ph.D., author of *Comparatively Speaking*, noted that it's imperative to remember that there is a difference between "being alone" and "feeling lonely." Society tends to place negative connotations around people being alone, even when there's no reason for it. He reminds us that although being isolated from one's family, or not having a friend group or partner this holiday season, may cause us to feel loneliness or anxiety, going solo may actually free us from many of the stresses caused by the holidays themselves. If we're being honest, it's quite possible we might not even enjoy the company of those we are supposed to gather and celebrate with, and taking a little time for ourselves might be the most

propitious way to spend the vacation days, without the need to entertain or manage anyone's feelings outside our own. Dealing with the planning, shopping, cooking, and cleaning that goes along with holiday festivities definitely has the potential to cause more anxiety than the simple quietness of time spent alone. In fact, solitude can give us some much-needed time to focus on self-care, reflect, and savor whatever small but significant things that might bring us joy.

Remember Alone is Not Lonely

We're not alone in being alone. Yes, it is a song lyric by the Police, but Sting was always a steward of moral life lessons. One good thing to remember during bouts of lonesomeness is there's always someone else out there in a similar situation – which can be a comforting thought. Elizabeth Scott, Ph.D., encourages us to acknowledge that our feelings of loneliness are completely valid, and there are many of us who feel the same way across the globe. She explains that while it might feel uncomfortable to be lonely – whether it's because circumstances prevent us from being with family, or we wish we were more connected to family or a supportive romantic relationship – it's totally OK to feel that way. Talking with others who may share our sentiments, whether it be friends, colleagues, or even online chat groups, can go a long way in helping us feel less secluded from the rest of the world. After all, we are still all in this together. **■**