



**Affiliates in Counseling & Psychology**  
175 Langley Drive, Suite 175  
Lawrenceville GA 30045  
V 770.995.7789 | f 770.995.0171  
joel@hitt.com

**Joel R. Hitt, M.Div., L.C.S.W.**

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### **End of Year Holiday Dynamics: Why We Feel Loss**

Here are some of the primary reasons patients tell me they experience sadness or depression around the end of the year holidays.

1. **Childhood Baggage.** Holiday rituals are fraught with all the baggage we bring with us from childhood. Frequently parents expect us to slip back into the roles we played in childhood--the "pretty one," the "bright one," the "athletic one." Hunter's character complains when her mom starts bossing her, "I am 4 years old again!" Many of us know about this 'time tunnel' experience. It can be stressful; for some it can be fun.
2. **Unrealistic Expectations.** We feel obligated to provide each other with a Currier and Ives holiday. Everybody feels ambivalent about that holiday vow of unconditional love: What if I have conditions? Everyone feels the pressure to feel an Ozzie and Harriet love because they are told to."
3. **Losses.** Getting together reminds us of who is not present. Foster says the film's characters "have this all encompassing feeling of having lost something at some point in their lives."
4. **Lifestyle Changes.** Great distances cause families to fragment now. You don't want to drive hundreds of miles during the holidays. For many, too, Thanksgiving is just a colossal amount of effort for people who work. It puts great pressure on families. The cook often doesn't get off work until Wednesday at 5:00.
5. **Secrets and Surprises.** These often occur around holidays, when the players are already primed for tense and alcohol-loosened responses.
6. **Family Cutoffs.** Sometimes old patterns, old resentments just stack up so high you can't see over the top to the person you once loved.