Do You Hate the Month of Love?

February brings with it images of hearts, flowers and gifts. But it’s not all Hallmark cards, roses and smiles for those with difficult histories tied to this time of the year, or those struggling with loneliness.

The time around Valentine’s Day can be especially trying, whether it’s because of the death of a loved one, divorce or break-up, personal trauma, or other challenges. We tend to look longingly at happy couples and families, and compare ourselves in a way that makes us feel inadequate. But even if February triggers difficult memories and emotions, there are steps you can take to replace them with healthier ones.

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“Dealing with difficult periods of the year is about figuring out what type of activities give you the most positive energy,” says Heidi Strickler, PhD, director of community counseling at Great Circle. “People who are more outgoing or extroverted may feel more energized around friends and family members with whom they’re comfortable or by participating in an event. And people who are introverted or reserved may be more energized by solitude or activities they can do on their own.”

1 Creativity rocks. Both types of personalities can get satisfaction from designing, creating and constructing useful or beautiful things. “Art can one of the most helpful emotional pursuits, allowing us to express feelings in a healthy way,” Strickler says. “Consider attending an art museum program, either alone or with friends. Take a class at a ceramics, jewelry or painting studio. Try working on a combined art piece, where one person starts on it, then passes it to the next person, and so on. You end up with a meaningful work of art to which everyone has contributed.” If you prefer creating alone, try crafts or journal writing at home, or check out one of the many adult coloring books being published.

2 Helping others helps. Often we feel better when we help others in meaningful ways. Strickler advises looking for volunteer opportunities in your community, whether it’s just for a few hours here and there, or committing to a regular schedule.

3 Brain & body fitness energizes. Lift your mood and get the endorphins flowing by signing up for a fitness membership or start with just one class at the Y. Or Strickler suggests learning something new by taking a fun and uplifting educational class at the local community center, church or university extension program.

4 Your health really does matter. Your state of mind really is tied to the health of your body. Strickler says doing the basics is essential. “Eat a balanced, nutritious diet. Get eight hours of sleep. Drink plenty of water. And make sure you plan some healthy movement each day. The way you take care of your physical health definitely affects your mental health.”

5 Create a help network. “Don’t be afraid to lean on others when you need help,” says Strickler. “And counseling is always a strong and very helpful option to help you find a fresh perspective or sort through tough issues.”

Instead of dreading the month of love, Strickler encourages making it your own, in a way that works best for you. “Create new memories that are special just for you. Focus on your positives, and not others’ expectations,” Strickler advises. “When you love yourself first, you’re in a better emotional state already if and when a new relationship comes your way in the future.”

Great Circle provides a unique spectrum of behavioral health services, including private counseling for children, adults and families facing personal challenges or difficult circumstances. To learn more about our community counseling services or to schedule an appointment, call 1-844-424-3577 (GCHELPS).