

Coping with the *Holidays*

Practical ways to support your mental health this season

Introduction

The holiday season can be a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness, but it can also bring stress, anxiety, and overwhelm. This booklet is designed to provide you with practical strategies and tactics to help you cope with the holidays and make the most of this special time of year. Whether you're dealing with family gatherings, financial pressures, or simply managing your own expectations, these tips will assist you in navigating the holiday season with confidence and ease.

The Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County and the Suicide Prevention Coalition collaborated to highlight topics of special concern for mental health wellness during the holidays.

With the right coping strategies and mindset, we can all make the most of this holiday season.

Need help now? Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for immediate, 24/7 mental health support.

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Tips for Overcoming Holiday Stress

The holidays can be a stressful time, but there are ways to reduce and cope with that stress. Here are a few:

- **Have reasonable expectations and be flexible.** Real life doesn't look like holiday movies!
- **Avoid toxic people whenever possible.** Every invitation doesn't have to be accepted.
- **Practice your breathing.** Deep breaths can help reduce stress and tension.
- **Think about priorities for holiday preparations.** What matters most to you? As pressures mount, relax and focus on your priorities.
- **Get enough sleep.** The National Sleep Foundation recommends adults (ages 18-64) get seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you.** Consider reconnecting with someone you have lost touch with.
- **Limit alcohol consumption.** Excessive drinking can increase depressive symptoms.
- **Don't be afraid to try something new!** Trying new things can be fun and memorable. Try to be flexible and open to celebrating the holidays in new ways.

10 Ways to Take Charge of Your Holiday Plans

Taking charge of your life will help you reduce stress. For some people, being assertive is hard, but it's worth it! Setting limits during the holidays can help avoid financial problems, depression and physical illness.

Here are 10 ways you can take charge of your holiday plans:

Know your needs and ask people to help you meet them.

Don't put higher expectations on yourself than you put on others.

Have a plan of action to help you enjoy the holidays. *(Who, What, When and How)*

Think positively about yourself, family, friends and your situation.

Take advantage of free activities like light displays and music.

Try not to compare yourself to others.

Plan ahead. Give yourself plenty of time to coordinate activities.

Count your blessings—try to see the cup as half full rather than half empty.

Remember that people are more important than gifts or possessions.

Pat yourself on the back for getting through another holiday.



7 Holiday Self-Care Tips

For many, the holiday season means planning and taking care of others. However, this leaves little time for taking care of oneself. Here are a few tips on practicing self-care during this holiday season.



- **Regularly schedule time to engage in self-care activities,** such as exercise, meditation or a hobby you enjoy.
- **Practice gratitude for the people and events in your life.** Consider keeping a gratitude journal or telling important people in your life why you appreciate them.
- **Tune into the emotions you are experiencing.** Emotions may be positive, negative or a combination of the two. Call "time outs" for yourself and check-in on your feelings. Remember that you're not alone with what you're feeling. You can talk to trusted family and friends about it.
- **Try to understand why you might be experiencing negative thoughts or feelings.** Are you expecting too much from yourself? Feeling overwhelmed? Give yourself space you to cope in those moments.
- **Monitor your stress level and notice what triggers your stress response.** Is it certain people? Specific activities? Have a list of activities to relax. Perhaps this is taking a walk, doing a few minutes of yoga, watching a favorite movie or playing with a pet.
- **Be present.** Practice mindfulness and meditation. Try taking a minute to be present in your environment. Take notice of the smells, sounds and sights of the holidays. Notice the differences between the holiday season and other times of the year.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Ensure adequate sleep. A nutritious diet is important: try to balance holiday foods and treats with healthy eating.

Grieving During the *Holidays*

Coping with loss during the holidays can be difficult no matter how recent your loss is. Remember, it's not about getting over, it's about getting through.

Love does not end with death.
Holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief—a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Sounds, sights and smells of the holidays may trigger memories of the loved one who has died.

Talk about your grief.
Don't be afraid to express your feelings about your loss. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly may make you feel better. Check-in with friends and relatives who care and will listen without passing judgement. They can help you to feel understood and not as isolated. If you are not ready to talk yet, let others know that.



Be aware of your physical or psychological limits.
Feelings of loss can leave you fatigued. The emotional stress may be exhausting, and low energy may naturally slow you down. Listen to what your body and mind are telling you. "Take care of yourself—physically and emotionally.

Talk about the person who has died.
Include your loved one's name in your conversations during the holidays. If you are able to talk openly, other people may recognize your need to remember your loved one who has died and be able to talk about them.

Do what feels right for you during the holidays.
Well-meaning family and friends often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend or family member. Talking about those wishes may help you clarify what it is you need and want to do during the holidays.

Plan ahead for holiday celebrations.
Structure your holiday time. This will help you to anticipate activities rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard may create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety during a time when your feelings of grief are already heightened. As you make your plans, leave room to change them if you feel the need.

Children, Teens & the *Holidays*

The holiday season can cause stress for children and teens too, and not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Watch for behavior changes in your child.

Some common changes to watch for include:

Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.

Excessive worry or sadness.

Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bed wetting).

Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens.

Poor school performance or avoiding school.

Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.

Difficulties with attention and concentration.

Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.

Use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.

Unexplained headaches or body pain.

Reach Out for Help

If you or your child are feeling too overwhelmed or are in crisis, reach out to connect with care. In Cuyahoga County, you can call or text the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**. Help is available 24/7, 365 days per year.

Holiday Fun *Activities*

If I feel mad or sad I take a few minutes to relax & breathe. That helps me cool down.



Color the snowman.

Coping Skills for Kids Word Search

T	P	T	A	K	E	B	R	E	A	K	T	R	A
A	L	K	C	L	S	C	E	A	U	S	D	O	E
L	A	L	E	A	M	T	C	O	L	O	R	E	O
K	Y	A	O	E	C	S	E	A	O	M	X	E	R
T	G	W	J	E	I	S	E	A	H	G	U	A	L
O	A	E	B	N	M	U	S	I	C	I	A	C	E
S	M	R	G	E	E	H	T	A	E	R	B	N	L
O	E	A	L	A	O	L	K	E	E	D	L	H	I
M	O	E	N	D	A	B	K	N	M	E	T	A	M
E	G	O	A	R	K	O	Y	O	G	A	M	E	S
O	R	N	W	R	I	T	E	H	A	A	E	A	T
N	C	E	J	O	U	R	N	A	L	T	A	T	A
E	R	E	A	U	P	D	K	H	T	H	L	W	L
O	E	O	C	D	P	E	X	E	R	C	I	S	E

TAKE BREAK
BREATHE
TALK TO SOMEONE
WALK
EXERCISE
YOGA
WRITE
JOURNAL
READ
MUSIC
SING
DANCE
SMILE
LAUGH
COLOR
PLAY GAME

Tips to Give Children & Teens During the Holidays



- **Manage Your Own Stress.** Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the holidays calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for children. Be a role model. Connect with others, take breaks, get enough sleep, exercise and eat well.

- **Keep Your Routines (as best as you can).** It's important to keep regular routines even during the holidays.

- **Manage Expectations.** Be up front, let kids know what they can and can't expect during the holidays.

- **Talk to Them.** Be honest, focus on the positive and give them space for their feelings. Be available to answer questions they may have.

Reassurance and Resilience. Reassure children that everything will be okay even if things don't go as planned. Share with them how you deal with stress so that they can learn from you how to cope with stress.

- **Spend Time Together.** Real time, where you are sharing an activity and doing things that involve actual interaction. Play games together. Bake cookies. Have a dance party. Read together.

- **Create a New Holiday Tradition/Rituals:** Make homemade gifts or new decorations, create things you can do together every year that are meaningful and fun. Get children involved in helping others—donate to a toy drive, deliver a note to a neighbor, or call or write a family member.

Dealing with Loss or Change During the Holidays

The holidays can be painful for those who have lost a loved one or have gone through divorce, especially children. Coping with separation and loss is magnified during the holidays. People may feel pressured to celebrate the holidays while their world seems to be falling apart.

How to Help Someone Deal with a Loss

Allow them to talk about their feelings and memories, and try to get them involved in new activities. Respect a person who is not ready to talk about their loss yet.

Change your traditional pattern in some way, and create new rituals and family traditions.

Don't let a person spend too much time alone. If a person becomes depressed, help is available from the crisis hotline 24/7. Call or text 988.

Remember, many people think of their pets as part of the family, and their loss can be painful, too.

Getting Through Divorce

After divorce, be sure to let children know that the holidays will continue, but in a different way. Decide ahead of time how the holidays will be divided, and include children in the planning.

Make sure you and your children have realistic expectations. Never put children in the middle of disagreements or ask them to choose sides.

Try to get plenty of rest, exercise and eat healthy to help your ability to cope. Remember, tired children are more easily stressed and moody.

Plan fun activities. If memories are too painful, try starting a new tradition to enjoy together. Take one day at a time. Rely on support from friends and family. It will get easier with time.

Tips for Individuals in Recovery

The holidays can be challenging for individuals in recovery from substance use disorders (SUD). Here are some tips if you are in recovery:

Put your recovery/ sobriety first.

Surround yourself with others in recovery, especially before or after stressful events.

Hosting a Recovery-Friendly Holiday Party

If you have a loved one in recovery, ask them prior to an event how you can be supportive.

Always have non-alcoholic beverage options.

If you are in a 12-Step or other recovery support group, plan on going to more meetings during the holidays.

Practice self-care and an attitude of gratitude.

Remember—it is OK to say "no" to going somewhere that may threaten your recovery/ sobriety or well-being.

Make a plan and share it with your support system. Plans can include, an exit for stressful events, how to turn down a drink, or how to avoid a negative or hurtful family member.

Ask for help and support when you need it.

Be understanding if your loved one must leave early or can only stay for a short while.

Remember—you can't cause, cure or control someone's illness or recovery. Instead, be kind, supportive and understanding.

Holiday Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

SAD, also known as the winter blues, is a type of depression that comes and goes with the four seasons. It typically manifests during the cold autumn and winter months when the days are shorter, darker and chillier. Some tips that may alleviate SAD symptoms include:

Light Therapy.
There are devices that simulate natural light. You should consult with your health care provider before trying any new therapies.

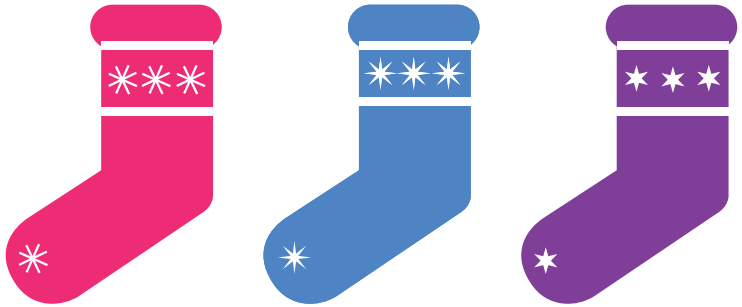
Stay Active.
A daily walk in the middle of the day could be as helpful as light therapy for coping.

Create Social Situations.
During the winter, a lack of regular social interaction can leave you feeling down. Try to push yourself to connect with others through phone, video or even writing letters. Once you make the effort, the social interaction can lift your spirits.

Supporting Older Adults During the Holidays

The holiday season is a happy and joyous time for most, but many older adults find the season hectic, confusing and even depressing depending on their mental, physical and emotional condition. Here are some ways you can support the older adults in your life this holiday season:

- **Spend quality time with the older adults in your life.** There is a lot to learn from them. Call, send a letter or spend time in-person.
- **Plan.** Make sure to plan ahead, and involve the older adults in your life in the planning. What are their hopes and expectations?
- **Be thoughtful.** Many older adults experience memory loss, so keep this in mind when you're telling stories or rehashing events from the past.
- **Explore old memories.** Older adults love to share happy, humorous and light-hearted memories so ask them to share memories if they are able to.
- **Fight the downside.** Depression has a way of sneaking up on you. If you or an older loved one have symptoms of depression for two weeks, talk to your doctor.
- **Help the older adults in your life by monitoring their medication intake and alcohol consumption.** During the hectic holiday season, it can be easy for older adults to forget to take their medications or drink a little too much. Look out for their best interest at all times.



10 Meaningful & Inexpensive Ways *to Celebrate the Holidays*



There are plenty of meaningful and inexpensive ways to celebrate the holidays. Here are some ideas:

- Have a cookie baking competition or gingerbread house contest.
- Read stories, watch a movie or check out holiday light displays.
- Have children sing to their grandparents and other family.
- Create a playlist of favorite holiday songs that everyone can add to and listen to even if you are not all together.
- Make a homemade gift or decoration.
- Look back at family photos and add some new ones to your collection.
- Plan a holiday sweater competition.
- Play holiday-themed charades or check out some of the games available for free online.
- Have each person write on a piece of paper something he/she appreciates about each member of the family and one gift (that can't be bought) that he/she will give each member. For example, a child might write, *"Dad, I really appreciate the fact that you take time to help me with my homework. My gift to you will be at least 15 minutes to relax when you get home."* Then, everyone takes turns reading what they wrote.
- Share some of your favorite recipes; write them on pretty cards and mail them as gifts. You could share them by email also.

Reach Out

If You Need Help, Resources are Available

If you or someone you know is in crisis or if the stress of the holiday season becomes too much, please seek help. You can get help from these resources:

988 – Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 to connect with trained crisis counselors who can provide immediate emotional support and link you to local services.

2-1-1 – United Way HelpLink: Dial 2-1-1 for assistance with housing, food, utilities, shelter, and other basic needs that may be impacting your mental health.

Warm Line – 440-886-5950: For non-crisis support, call the Warm Line to speak with a trained peer supporter who can listen and help you through difficult moments during the holiday season.

About the

Suicide Prevention Coalition

The coalition is composed of organizations, community members and survivors dedicated to instilling hope, raising awareness, providing education and promoting resources in an effort to reduce the incidence of suicide and suicidal behavior. Membership is open to any individual or organization committed to suicide awareness and prevention serving residents of Cuyahoga County. To join the coalition, reach out to **Keneifa Davis**, behavioral health specialist at **davis@adamhscc.org**.

Conclusion

The holidays can be a wonderful time for making memories and connecting with loved ones. By applying the strategies and tactics outlined in this booklet, you can reduce stress, build resilience, and make the most of the holiday season. Remember that it's okay to seek help and support when needed, and that self-care should always be a priority. With the right tools and mindset, you can create a holiday season that is truly meaningful and fulfilling.

This guide is brought to you by:

Suicide Prevention Coalition
CUYAHOGA COUNTY

ADAMHS
BOARD OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY
ALCOHOL, DRUG ADDICTION & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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