

Mental Health Matters

November 2022



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Holiday Depression & Stress

Although the holidays are supposed to be a time full of joy, good cheer and optimistic hopes for a new year, many people struggle during the holiday season when expectations are high and disrupted routines can feel overwhelming. However, some mental preparations and planning can help everyone cope with the season -- and even enjoy it.

Self-care. Pay special attention to your eating, sleeping, and downtime. It might be OK to skimp on a few hours of sleep just before a relaxing weekend, but think again if that weekend will include the stress of traveling, visiting or other activities out of your normal routine. Don't forget to factor in downtime, too. Planning every hour of your time off can seem like a great idea, until you realize there is no time left to unwind.

Fun, not perfection. Resist the urge to do everything you can to make the season perfect for everyone. Just have as much fun as you can and don't expect it to be perfect.

Anticipate stress. Plan ahead of time what your strategy will be when times get stressful. Is it possible to take a walk outside for 15 minutes when a family gathering gets stressful? How about a trip to your favorite store if your schedule gets you down?

Coping with Stress During the Holidays

- Keep expectations manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don't put the entire focus on just one day (i.e. Thanksgiving Day). Remember that it's a season of holiday sentiment, and activities can be spread out to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.
- Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely; there is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.
- Leave "yesteryear" in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don't set yourself up in comparing today with the "good ol' days."
- Do something for someone else. Try volunteering some your time to help others.
- Enjoy activities that are free, such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping or making a snowman with children.
- Be aware of excessive drinking. It will only increase your feelings of stress.
- Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way.

Full article found at <https://www.mhawisconsin.org/holidaystress.aspx>





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In case of an Emergency:

- **911 For Immediate Support**
- **Ventura County Crisis Team (866) 998-2243 –(24 hours)**

**MENTAL
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#ENDTHESTIGMA

Facing Holiday-Associated Trauma

It's deemed "the most wonderful time of the year." For many, the holiday season is often filled with loving memories of family and friends. It's a time to reconnect with loved ones and share in family traditions; a time that most people look forward to. But what happens when the holiday season is not a joyful time? For some individuals, the holidays can bring up old trauma wounds that have yet to be forgotten. Trauma is "an emotional response to a terrible event" that can lead to long-term reactions such as flashbacks, strained relationships, unpredictable emotions, and physical ailments such as nausea and headaches. When trauma is associated with the holidays, it can make managing symptoms especially difficult because there is an expectation for everyone to be happy during this time of year. The thought of gathering with family members during such trying times can invoke feelings of anxiety and stress. Here are a few tips to help you face trauma during the holidays.

Identify Trauma Triggers

Trauma triggers are things that lead up to the emotional reaction that trauma produces. These triggers can be a sound, smell, person, environment or thought that causes us to no longer feel emotionally safe. Because the holidays are known for certain smells, decorations, songs, etc., it is important to identify trauma triggers that may occur during the holiday season. Knowing triggers that cause an emotional response is a good first step in being able to help manage those responses. Depending on how much trauma work you've done, you may know what triggers you. Some triggers don't present themselves until you are put in a particular situation that causes you to feel emotionally unsafe. When you realize that you are being triggered, try to identify what it is and how you can either remove yourself from the trigger or find ways to cope while it is present.

Practice Good Self-Care

The holiday season represents a time for giving and we're taught to put others first. Though it is good to care for others during this season, if you are dealing with trauma, remember to take good care of yourself. The holidays are a busy time that can leave us physically and mentally exhausted. Find time to rest and maintain good sleeping habits. When you are experiencing a trauma response, practice grounding techniques. Meditation is a good mindfulness tool to help you remain grounded when trauma triggers arise. It only takes a few minutes to practice deep breathing exercises and clear your mind to help regulate your emotions.

Do what brings you joy! Whether it's taking a walk, reading a book or listening to your favorite music, find ways to nourish your soul. While you are entertaining family members and finding ways to show your appreciation and gratitude for others, remember that you cannot pour from an empty glass. Being good to yourself will help you be good to others around you.

Set Boundaries with Family Members

Let's face it, families can be complex. Intentionally or unintentionally, our loved ones can sometimes be our greatest triggers when it comes to trauma.

Full article found at <https://discoverymood.com/blog/facing-holiday-associated-trauma/#:~:text=For%20some%20individuals%2C%20the%20holidays,such%20as%20nausea%20and%20headaches.>