



The **PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Helping youth navigate life's challenges



A program of the Prevention Council of Saratoga County

Coping With The Holidays

And A Pandemic

The Prevention Council of Saratoga County and the Community Coalition for Family Wellness offer this booklet to provide information and strategies to help you and your family get through this challenging holiday season.



A Holiday Season Like No Other

You can make this season's celebration a beautiful, fulfilling experience for yourself and those close to you. Once you know what to guard against and how to handle matters in a new way, you and your family will be better able to enjoy the holiday season.

The successful mindset for a happy holiday season requires flexibility and a willingness to break out of old patterns to find new, more satisfying ones. Combined with a little planning and self-care you will be on your way.

The holidays are going to look a lot different for everyone this year. With the right coping strategies, we can all make the most of this holiday season.

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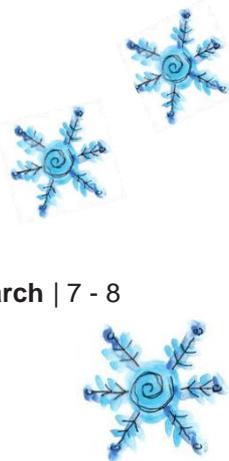
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Tips for Overcoming Holiday Stress

This holiday season is going to present some new challenges and changes, adding stress to an already stressful time. Here are some tips that could help reduce some of that stress:

- **Have reasonable expectations and be flexible.** Real life doesn't look like holiday movies, especially during a pandemic!
- **Avoid toxic people whenever possible.** Every invitation doesn't have to be accepted.
- **Practice your breathing.** Deep breaths can help reduce stress and tension. Be sure that you are at least six feet away from others if practicing deep breathing.
- **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.
- **Safely spend time with people who are supportive and care about you.** Maybe try 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. This year we all need to be flexible and open to celebrating the holidays in ways we haven't done before. *See page 13 for safe and inexpensive holiday celebration ideas.*



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.

This year, you also need to take charge of how you will celebrate the holidays safely. Everyone will need to make decisions that are the best for them and their families, and that might be hard because not everyone will agree on what is best. Here are 10 ways you can take charge of your holiday plans:

1. Know your needs and ask people to help you meet them.
2. Don't put higher expectations on yourself than you put on others.
3. Have a plan of action to help you enjoy the holidays. (Who, What, When and How)
4. Think positively about yourself, family, friends and your situation.
5. Take advantage of free activities such as online light displays and music.
6. Try not to compare yourself to others.
7. Plan ahead. Give yourself plenty of time to coordinate safe activities.
8. Count your blessings - try to see the cup as half full rather than half empty.
9. People are more important than possessions. Learn to live more with less.



7 Holiday Season 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. Below are a few tips on practicing self-care during this holiday season.

- 1. Regularly schedule time to engage in self-care activities, such as exercise, meditation or a hobby you enjoy.**
- 2. 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.
- 3. 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.
- 4. Try to understand why you might be experiencing negative thoughts or feelings.** Are you expecting too much from yourself? Feeling overwhelmed? Give yourself the space you need to cope in those moments.
- 5. Monitor your stress level and notice what triggers your stress response.** Is it certain people? Specific activities? Have a list of options you can do to relax for a few minutes. Perhaps this is taking a walk, doing a few minutes of yoga, watching a favorite movie or playing with a pet.
- 6. Being present.** Practice mindfulness and meditation. This can include spending a minute or two being 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. Mindfulness techniques can be more than quiet contemplation.
- 7. Take care of your physical health.** Ensure adequate sleep. A nutritious diet is important: try to balance special holiday foods and treats with healthy eating. Also remember to social distance, wear a mask, wash your hands often and stay home if you’re feeling sick.

Grieving During the Holidays

Coping with loss during the holidays can be difficult no matter how recent your loss is. The loss of loved ones, jobs and even traditions will leave many grieving in some way this holiday season. Remember, it's not about getting over, it is 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 your 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. 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 and COVID-19

Watch for behavior changes in your child. Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way.

Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting).
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens.
- Poor school performance or avoiding school.
- Difficulties with attention and concentration.
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Reach Out for Help: If you or your child are feeling too overwhelmed or are in crisis, reach out to connect with care. Call the New York State Mental Health Hotline at 1-844-863-9314.



Check out the next two pages for some fun kids activities!





Kindness Matters

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ACCEPTANCE
CALM
COMMUNICATE
EMOTIONS
ENCOURAGE
FAMILY

FRIENDS
FRIENDSHIP
HAPPY
HELP
KINDNESS
LISTEN

OPENMINDED
POSITIVE
RELAX
RESPECT
SUPPORT
TRUST

Children, Teens, the Holidays and COVID-19

- **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 and COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for children. Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.
- **Keep Your Routines (as best as you can).** With so many changes in children's lives because of the pandemic, it is important to keep regular routines even during the holidays. Make sure children get enough sleep, eat nutritious food and keep them active. This helps everyone manage stress.
- **Manage Expectations.** Be up front, let kids know what they can and can't expect during the holidays. If your family is experiencing hardship because of the pandemic, create a homemade gift theme for the year. Encourage creativity. It will keep children engaged and give them something to look forward to. T
- **Talk to Them.** Be honest, focus on the positive and give them space for their feelings. Make sure children are aware of the changes that will be happening during the holiday season and talk to them about COVID-19 in a way that they can understand. Be available to answer questions they may have. Limit exposure to news coverage, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- **Reassurance and Resilience.** Reassure children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn from you how to cope.
- **Spend some 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/Ritual:** Make homemade gifts or new decorations together, create things you can do together every year that are meaningful and fun. Get children involved in helping others - donate to a toy drive or donate gently used clothes, deliver a note to a neighbor, or call or write a family member.

Dealing with a Loss or Change

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 yet 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.
- 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 so you will be better able to cope. Remember, tired children are more easily stressed and likely to be 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, and realize that 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.
- Practice self-care and an attitude of gratitude.
- 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. Consider attending stressful events virtually this year instead so that you have more control over who and what is around you.
- Remember - it is OK to say “no” to going somewhere that may threaten your recovery/sobriety.
- Ask for help and support when you need it. Call the Healing Springs Recovery Community and Outreach Center at 518-306-3048.



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.

Ways to Be There for 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. This holiday season will be especially difficult because of isolation and Coronavirus safety concerns. Here are some ways you can be there this holiday season for the older adults in your life:

- **Spend quality time with the older adults in your life.** There is a lot to learn from them. They will appreciate the time you spend with them. Call, video chat or send a letter to the older adults in your life to check-in and spend time together. Remember to help with technology when help is needed.
- 
- A cartoon snowman with a white body, a red hat with a white pom-pom, and a green scarf. It has a carrot nose and stick arms. The snowman is holding a red heart in its right hand and a smartphone in its left hand. The smartphone screen shows a cartoon reindeer with a red nose and antlers.
- **Plan.** The holiday season will look much different for many older adults this year. Make sure to plan ahead, and involve the older adults in your life in the planning. What are their hopes and expectations? If your loved one lives in a nursing home or assisted living facility, consider asking staff what is allowable. Are you able to bring a gift or home cooked meal? What are the guidelines? Planning ahead will help things go more smoothly.
 - **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 and seniors love to share happy, humorous and light-hearted memories. It can also be a wonderful way for them to interact with the "younger crowd."
 - **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 Safe and Inexpensive Ways to Celebrate the Holidays

There are plenty of safe, fun and inexpensive ways to celebrate the holidays together while staying physically distant. Here are some ideas on fun things you can get together virtually to do:

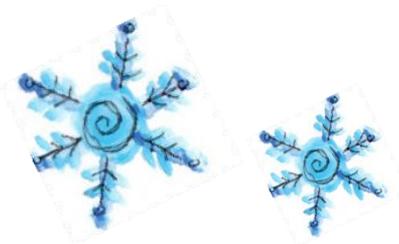
1. Have a virtual cookie baking competition or gingerbread house contest. Turn to social media to have people vote on their favorite!
2. Read stories, watch a movie or check out holiday light displays online.
3. Have children sing to their grandparents and other family.
4. Create a playlist of favorite holiday songs that everyone can add to and listen to even if you are not all together.
5. Start a safe holiday Tik Tok challenge with your family and friends.
6. Create a virtual photo album that everyone can add to on Facebook or in a Google Drive. Everyone can share favorite photos from past holiday celebrations. You could print the photos to put in a real album afterwards too.
7. Plan an ugly holiday sweater competition.
8. Play holiday-themed charades or check out some of the games available online that were made to play virtually.
9. 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 the computer. My gift to you will be at least 15 minutes to relax when you get home." Then, everyone takes turns reading what they wrote.
10. Share some of your favorite recipes; write them on pretty cards and mail them as gifts. You could share them by email also.



CDC Holiday Celebration Guidelines

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released guidelines on how to safely celebrate the holidays. Celebrating virtually or with members of your own household poses low risk for spread. In-person gatherings pose varying levels of risk, and event organizers and attendees should consider the risk of virus spread. Here is what to consider for holiday gatherings (*Visit the CDC website for full guidelines: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html*):

- **Monitor community spread.** If there are high numbers where the gathering will be held or where you live, consider a virtual gathering.
- **Size and behavior.** Limit the number of guests, consider staying at home for 14-days prior to the gathering, gather with people who have been practicing safer behaviors like mask wearing, avoiding large events and keeping distance.
- **Location.** Outdoor is safer than indoor.
- **Duration.** Keep the gatherings short.
- **Food safety.** Consider individual portions or having each family bring their own meals. If sharing a meal, have one person serve the meals.
- **General safety.** Wear a mask, keep distance between guests, make sure there is good ventilation, wash hands, and clean common and high touch areas.
- **Stay home.** If you are sick or if you are high risk.



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 any of the following:

- **NYS Emotional Support Helpline 1-844-863-9314**
7 days a week, 8am – 10pm
- **New York State HOPEline: 1-877-8-HOPENY Text 467369**
24/7 support for problem gambling, alcohol, and chemical dependency
- **Suicide Prevention Coalition of Saratoga County: 1-800-273-8255**
- **24-Hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255**
- **Healing Springs Recovery Community and Outreach Center 518-306-3048**
- **Wellspring 518-584-8188** 24/7 support for anyone impacted by domestic violence or sexual assault

We hope this guide will help you cope with stress and change and be more resilient during the holidays.



Start your gratitude journal here:



List relaxation options to reduce stress:





The **PREVENTION COUNCIL**

Helping youth navigate life's challenges

About The Prevention Council of Saratoga County

The Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Council of Saratoga County, Inc, is a nonprofit, community-based organization working to prevent alcohol, drug and other substance abuse throughout Saratoga County.

www.preventioncouncil.org

(518) 581-1230



A program of the Prevention Council of Saratoga County

About the Community Coalition for Family Wellness

An organization of caring community members working proactively to reduce youth substance use and risky behavior; while providing families with resources, education, and activities that promote safety, health, and wellness.

www.ccfwsgf.org

(518) 581-1230 ext. 3618



We wish to thank the ADAMHS Board and the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Ohio who collaborated to highlight topics of special concern for mental health wellness during the holidays.