

Surround
yourself
with people
who make you
feel
happy

How to Stress Less this Holiday Season

Holidays are a time of festivities and good cheer. Many people look forward to spending time with loved ones and friends and sharing celebrations. For others this can be a time of stress, unhappiness and loneliness.

Relationships can be one factor in the formula of festive stress. It may be a difficult time because family and friends cannot be with you. Perhaps they live in a different country, state, or even city. If family is close by other factors may prevent spending the time together, such as difficulties in the relationship, illness, or inability to travel. We all hope to spend time with people that make us feel happy and positive during the festive season, but this isn't always possible.

Managing relationships at Christmas and other large holidays

Feelings of stress, anxiety and depression are common during the festive season. If nothing else, reassure yourself that these feelings are normal. There are things that can help you to cope with the stress and make holiday times more manageable.

10 Tips

1. Have realistic expectations of yourself and others.

Holidays aren't a time to address long-term conflict.

Try to let go of past negative feelings at least for

that one day. It will help get through the holidays and enable everyone to enjoy the time together. Try to have an open mind and remain more relaxed during the celebrations.

Realistic
Expectations

2. Pick who you spend time with and talk to.

Do things with people you feel most comfortable with. Going for a long walk with a favourite relative or friend will give you time to be away from any tension or stress that you may be feeling, and allow you to spend time with someone special.

3. Avoid known triggers.

If politics or religion is a touchy subject, don't discuss it. If someone else brings up the topic, find a distraction and move onto another subject. If there's a particular person you are uncomfortable around, try to sit near someone else who will not cause you stress and worry.

Have
Fun

4. Plan fun things to do.

Family members are less likely to get into arguments if they are involved in activities such as board games or a cricket or soccer match in the backyard. Plan for something to do as a group and focus on things you enjoy doing together.

5. Take time out to spend with friends.

Take time out to spend with friends during the holidays as well as family. Allow yourself a break from spending all your time in one place so that you don't feel overwhelmed or resentful.

6. Set aside time for yourself.

This can be something as simple as going for a short walk, or having a nap. Having some 'me' time helps to refocus and relax.

7. Look after your physical health.

Getting enough sleep, keeping up with your regular activity routine, using relaxation techniques, and eating and drinking with moderation will help give you the stamina to get through the demands of the season.

Set
limits

8. Set limits.

Set limits for the amount of time you will spend with family and friends, depending if you are travelling, or they are visiting you. This makes your time together special and more enjoyable.

9. Be grateful.

Be grateful that you have family and friends to share the holidays with. Appreciate the small things that other people do for you and reciprocate with gestures that show your appreciation for them. This takes away the negativity and replaces it with positive thoughts and actions.

Be
grateful

10. Do something positive

If you are alone for the holidays do something positive for yourself. Cook a nice meal that you will enjoy, have a good book or movie to watch, go for a walk and if possible ring someone that you're not able to be with and catch up by phone or video. Consider volunteering so that you spend time with others and have a welcoming place to go.

Do
something
positive

Christmas is lonely for many – spread the cheer

Everyone would like to spend the holidays with people close to them. Remember how fortunate you are if you are able to do this. Many others are not so fortunate and this can be a difficult time to be alone or separated from loved ones.

If you know someone who will be alone over Christmas, one of the kindest things you can do is get in touch. Even if it's just a chat on Christmas morning, a hello, or an invitation to have cake in the afternoon, it can make a massive difference to their experience of the festive season.

Consider offering your time as a volunteer to help others who are less fortunate or alone. Random acts of kindness make us feel good and relieve our own stress by focusing on someone else.

If you don't have close family or friends to spend Christmas with, consider contacting friends or colleagues who are also not spending time with family. You'll be surprised how many people are separated from family and friends during the festive season. Get together on Christmas Day to do something different from what you'd do with family – such as a picnic in the city, a day at the beach or a themed party at someone's house. If you are alone on Christmas Day, remember that it's just one day out of 365.

Improving relationships during the rest of the year decreases festive stress

As the old saying goes, 'You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family.' Managing relationships year-round is central to enjoyment during the festive season.

Work on family relationships throughout the year and let people know you value them and how important they are to you. Christmas is not the day to resolve long-standing problems. Focus on keeping the peace and remember there are 364 other days in the year where you can work on improving your relationships.

Festive stress is normal, but if you're not coping, talk to someone

Remember just because some things are 'supposed' to be fun and festive around holiday time, doesn't mean that you will automatically feel happy and joyous. Respect how you feel and try to manage as best you can without putting too much pressure on yourself.

Accept that the festive season is a stressful time and allow yourself to have feelings about it. Remind yourself that the feelings will not stay forever, and you have the ability to make things better. When you are feeling sad, overwhelmed or stressed, ask yourself 'What can I do right now to feel better?'

This might involve practicing some of the tips suggested above to reduce relationship stress. It could also mean talking to someone about how you feel and sharing what the season is really like for you.

If you are having a hard time managing feelings of stress, anxiety or depression, it can be a good idea to talk to someone you trust or contact a counsellor or telephone helpline service such as Lifeline.

If you are seeing a counsellor or doctor already, make an appointment close to the holidays and discuss a plan with them to help you manage. Telephone counselling services are available during the holidays with counsellors willing to listen and help.

Most importantly take care of your own wellbeing. Try not to place too much pressure on yourself or other people because you feel you have to. Enjoy the holidays in whatever way is best for you and whatever way will cause the least amount of stress and anxiety.



*Festive
stress
is normal*

Where do I go for help?

Contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline if you are experiencing mental health-related distress or are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. Connect with a trained crisis counselor. 988 is confidential, free, and available 24/7/365. Call or text 988 Chat at <https://988lifeline.org>

Do you know a Veteran who is in crisis? Connect with the Veterans Crisis Line to reach caring, qualified responders with the Department of Veterans Affairs: Call 988 then press 1 or Text 838255. <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat>