

Holiday Stress Prevention Tips

The holiday season is a time full of celebrations with friends and family. However, the holiday season can also bring additional stress due to family conflicts, finances and time constraints. The extra demands and expectations that come along with the entertaining, shopping, decorating, baking and cleaning can lead to extra stress.

Use the following tips to help prevent getting too stressed out during the holiday season.

Tips for Everyone

- **Plan ahead.** Make lists for gift giving and holiday meal menus so that you do not spend extra time in the malls or grocery stores searching for the perfect item. Schedule time to go to the mall and other stores so that you can make the most out of each trip.
- **Learn to say no.** Get a calendar to organize your holiday commitments. Having a way to quickly see all of your holiday activities at once can help you to manage your time and avoid overbooking yourself. If the calendar has too many entries, allow yourself the luxury of saying no to new commitments.
- **Create a budget.** Include holiday decorations, gift-giving and meal preparations in your budget. This will help you to keep track of your spending so that you are not overwhelmed by debt after the hustle and bustle of the season is over.
- **Watch what you eat.** Holiday foods often are either heavy and rich or sweet and sugary. Eating too much of these foods can lead to feelings of lethargy. Limit your alcohol intake; remember that alcohol is a depressant and can lower your mood.
- **Exercise.** It is important to stick to an exercise plan even when the holiday season kicks into full swing. The holidays can be a good time to start an exercise program since exercise can help to relieve stress.
- **Simplify.** There is no such thing as the perfect party, decorations or holiday meal. Placing too much emphasis on the little details can cause unnecessary stress. Enjoy the holidays for what they are, and do not worry if they do not match the picture of what you think they should be.
- **Allow time to grieve.** For those of us who have lost loved ones, the holidays can be a painful reminder of their absence. Allow time for grieving and time for remembering. Sharing stories and shedding tears as a family can keep a person's spirit alive and strengthen family ties.
- **Delegate.** Do not be afraid to ask for help from family members; even children can be assigned age-appropriate decorating or baking tasks.

Travel Tips

- **Allow extra time.** Whether you are traveling by car or by air, allow yourself extra time to reach your destination. Many people travel during the holiday season, leading to heavy traffic and long lines at airports.
- **Prepare to wait.** If you allow yourself extra time to reach your destination, there is a chance that you will arrive there ahead of time. Bring magazines, books and other things to keep yourself and your family occupied if you find that you have to wait.
- **Have a backup plan.** Sometimes even the most careful planning is not enough. A traffic jam or bad weather may cause road delays, or long lines may lead to missed flights. Have a plan in place just in case you are unable to make it to your destination.

Tips for Blended Families

- **Communicate.** In order to make the holidays run more smoothly for everyone involved, it is important for divorced parents to communicate with one another. Talking about travel plans and coordinating gift-giving can show your children the real meaning of the holiday season.
- **Be specific.** When coordinating arrangements with an ex-spouse, be specific with respect to travel times and dates. This is especially important if children will be traveling between homes on the holiday itself.
- **Create new traditions.** Include new family members, such as stepchildren, in the planning and decorating. If you have a shared custody arrangement, you will also need to make new traditions for the years when your children are with the other parent.
- **Respect children's feelings.** Take the time to talk to your children about how they are feeling, especially if this is their first holiday season without both parents or with new stepsiblings.
- **Treat everyone equally.** Include all names on cards sent out to family members. Make every effort to give an equal number of gifts to each child, and try to keep the amount of money spent on each child equal. Although you may not think that this is an important detail, children often focus on equality in a new family.
- **Keep the focus on the children.** Your children may feel the need to visit with or call family members who are not present, such as the other parent or grandparents. Try to be understanding of this need, and allow for more flexibility as your children get older.

Resources

- American Psychiatric Association: www.psychiatry.org
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 866-483-1481

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: BBW

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