



# Mental Health Matters

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## Coping with Holiday and COVID-19 Stress

Source: [www.iuhealth.org](http://www.iuhealth.org)



With COVID-19 cases on the rise and the holidays around the corner, people may be feeling stress from all over. Family plans are changing. Days are getting shorter. And not to mention that the holidays in a typical year can be overwhelming anyway. Outside stressors may be bearing down too – kids at home, stressful work situations, and a persistent pandemic. It's normal to feel increased stress and anxiety. Here are some mental health tips to help you have a happy and healthy holiday season:

**Mentally prepare for the holidays.** Managing your expectations for the winter season can help you prepare for what's to come. Before filling out your calendar, sit down and be realistic with yourself.

**Make safe choices for your family.** Once you've identified your priorities, plan how you can meet your expectations in a way that's safe and responsible. Whether you host a virtual dinner, spend the holidays at home or create new traditions, you can still be creative and have a meaningful holiday season at home. Unforeseen circumstances are out of your control. Practicing mindfulness can help ground you when you feel overwhelmed by unpredictability.

**Learn how to respond to feeling overwhelmed.** It's important to slow down and acknowledge why you may be feeling the way you are. Sometimes you need to walk away from what you're doing for a few minutes; take some deep slow breaths in a quiet space; write down and prioritize what needs to be done first; ask yourself if what you're feeling stressed about is even worth it; and give yourself permission to now sweat the small stuff.

**Look on the sunny side.** As days get shorter in the winter, you might find yourself lacking energy and motivation. Try to embrace winter by planning fun activities and things to look forward to during the colder and darker months. Some of these activities could include sledding or building a snowman, weekly movie or game nights, craft nights, cook new recipes with your family, or have a dance party. Also, be sure that you're getting all the necessary vitamins and minerals that boost your energy levels.

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**Keep on moving.** While the winter weather can make you want to spend all your free time under a blanket, it's important to remain active. If you don't feel comfortable going to a gym or it's too cold for your favorite outdoor activities, there are plenty of ways to get active at home. But just because it's cold doesn't mean you can't go outside and bike, walk, or skate. The goal is to get at least 2.5 hours a week of physical activity.

**Take time for yourself.** While it may be disappointing that some of your traditional holiday plans have shifted this year, try to be optimistic. Take advantage of the quiet winter season to decompress and do some self-care. Reset if you feel burned out and make sure you're getting enough sleep, eating well, drinking lots of water, and staying active. Moderate alcohol or unhealthy foods to cope with stress. Organize your life and space for more clarity. Plan some realistic goals you'd like to achieve in the upcoming year. Stay productive with activities that you can enjoy to help you remain present. Be sure to check in with loved ones through phone or video chats to stay connected.

Just remember we're all living through this together and will eventually get to the other side of this pandemic. Don't beat yourself up as you try to learn how to do a virtual meeting or prepare your children for school. You're doing the best you can. We all need to try to support and lift each other up during this time.



## 4 Mindful Tips to De-Stress this Holiday Season

Source:

[www.hopkinsmedicine.org](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org)

Not feeling particularly cheery this time of year: You're not alone. Many find that the holidays bring as much stress as they do joy. But there are ways to ease through the season. Mindfulness is bringing your attention to the present moment with an element of nonjudgement and acceptance. It is noticing when we get caught up in thoughts about the past or future, and returning our attention to the present. While mindfulness can be a formal meditation practice, there are also informal ways to practice this skill. This can give us perspective and decrease stress

Here are four ways to help make your holidays brighter:

1. **Accept Imperfection.** Can good be good enough? Before you start preparing, acknowledge that things may not go exactly as planned. It's ok if it's not perfect. Imperfection is healthy and normal. For some of us, it might just take a little practice.
2. **Don't Lost Sight of What Really Counts.** With long lines and nasty traffic, the holidays can get hectic. When overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle, ask yourself:
  - a. Where does this fit in the grand scheme of things?
  - b. Can I use this moment of frustration as an opportunity to reflect?
  - c. Even if this moment seems stressful, can I find a way to make it pleasant?
3. **Respond with Kindness.** You can't change how others act during the stresses of the holiday season, but you can change how you respond to situations. Keep in mind that the holidays are especially difficult for those who are alone. See if you can extend an act of kindness to those you know are without family and friends during this time of year. Also, if things do get tense with someone, remember to take a few deep breaths to try to shift things and give you new perspective.
4. **Rethink Your Resolutions.** Typical New Year's resolutions set you up for failure. If you want to better yourself in the new year, start small and be kind to yourself. Break your goal into tinier steps over the course of the year. Also, if you didn't achieve last year's resolution or stray from the path this time around, let it go, and just try to pick your goals back up without the guilt or shame.



## How to Help Kids Handle Holiday Disappointment During COVID-19

Source: [www.connecticutchildrens.org](http://www.connecticutchildrens.org)

This year has been difficult to say the least. With the holidays approaching, and the challenges and uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic still ongoing, you may be wondering how to help your child cope with the disappointment of things being different this year.

### Children 0-3 Years Old: Focus on quality time during the holidays, and don't worry about the details

- ✓ Children this age will not be able to recall detailed memories of holidays past and will not recall the events of this year in the future.
- ✓ It's ok to keep things very simple for children this age in terms of celebrations and explanations.
- ✓ All children benefit from having quiet-down time to feel love and attention from parents, and this is the perfect season to indulge kids with affection.

### Children 4-6 Years Old: Create new, quarantine-approved holiday traditions

- ✓ Establish traditions within your immediate family – make holiday decorations, make a home-made gift, cook a special meal.
- ✓ Instead of in-person visits with friends, family, or even Santa, consider fun ways to have a video interaction, write letters, or make cards.
- ✓ Don't punish children for having a negative reaction to holiday changes this year. Tell them it's ok to feel sad, disappointed, or angry.
- ✓ Find the positive and teach positive self-talk.

### Children 6-12 Years Old: Help your child cope with holiday blues, and build resilience for the future

- ✓ Validate their feelings of disappointment and sadness about changes to their holiday traditions.
- ✓ Remember that helping children overcome disappointment helps them build resiliency.
- ✓ Ask them for their ideas about how to make the holiday special.
- ✓ Teach fun relaxation strategies like yoga, slow breathing, or using the scent of a favorite treat, lotion, or candle.

### Children 13-18 Years Old: Ask, listen, and encourage COVID-safe holiday activities

- ✓ Ask teens how they are feeling, and let them know you are there if they need to talk.
- ✓ Listen! Often, teens just want someone to listen and not solve the problem for them.
- ✓ Allow them a sense of control by giving them choices, and encourage positive activities to honor the holiday season, such as how to volunteer the socially-distanced way.

The holidays are an exciting time of good cheer, warm family traditions, and spending time with friends. Or are they? For many people, the idea of entering a crowded room and chatting up coworkers or strangers at a party, exchanging gifts with friends, traveling from home, or attending large family gatherings can produce intense anxiety, depression, or both.

### How to De-Stress... You can reduce some of your holiday worry and stress with these tips:

- Take the pressure off yourself by not setting expectations too high.
- Most people aren't paying much attention to you, because in reality, they are probably wondering what you are thinking of them.
- Identify your specific concerns, and remind yourself that although you may feel uncomfortable, that's the worst that can happen.
- Don't look for relief in alcohol or drugs.
- Smile, make eye contact, and ask questions. Avoid religion, politics, and other topics that can lead to heated discussions and add to your stress.
- Choose to say no and not overschedule yourself during the holiday season.

### Help Your Anxious Children

For some children the holidays evoke fear and anxiety. Anxious children tend to be hyperaware of their surroundings, and they're always on the lookout for possible threats or risks in new situations. Here are some ideas for reducing children's holiday anxiety:

- Plan ahead. Talk to your child about what makes them anxious during this time of year and come up with ways to minimize that anxiety.
- Eliminate the unexpected. Tell your child who will be there and how you'll get there.
- Create a secret signal that you and your child can use to let you know they need your help without alerting others in the room.
- Schedule special family time to play a board game, watch a favorite holiday movie, or make cookies.
- Take care of yourself. Your child will pick up on your stress, so try to make sure the entire family eats well, drinks enough water, and exercises.

Source: [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)



Your day-to-day activities offer ample opportunities to call up mindfulness in any moment. These simple practices will breathe space into your daily routines.

1. **Mindful Wakeup: Start with a Purpose.** On waking, sit in your bed or chair in a relaxed posture. Take 3 long, deep, nourishing breaths. Ask yourself what your intention is for the day, and set your intention. Throughout the day, check in with yourself.
2. **Mindful Eating: Enjoy Every Mouthful.** Breathe before eating, listen to your body, eat according to your hunger, practice peaceful eating, and if you don't love it, don't eat it.
3. **Mindful Pause: Rewire Your Brain.** Trip over what you want to do, refresh your triggers regularly, and create new patterns.
4. **Mindful Workout: Activate Your Mind and Your Muscles.** Be clear about your aim, warm up, settle into a rhythm, challenge yourself, cool down, and rest.
5. **Mindful Driving: Drive Yourself Calm, Not Crazy.** Take a deep breath, ask yourself what you need, give yourself what you need, look around and recognize that all the other drivers are just like you, and take another deep breath.

Source: [www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)