

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Gary J. Meiers, Ph. D., Jo Ann Hammond, Ph. D.,
& Associates, Ltd.

10009 – 85 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 2J9



Website: drsgaryjoanmeierspsychologists.ca

Phone: (780) 433-2269

Fax: (780) 431-0463

E-Mail: psychrec@gmail.com

Stress, Depression, and the Holidays: Tips for Coping

The Mayo Clinic

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays often present a dizzying array of demands — cooking meals, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. And if coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is spreading in your community, you may be feeling additional stress, or you may be worrying about you and your loved ones' health. You may also feel stressed, sad, or anxious because your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones for other reasons, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events or communities. Many may have websites, online support groups, social media sites or virtual events. They can offer support and companionship. If you're feeling stress during the holidays, it also may help to talk to a friend or family member about your concerns. Try reaching out with a text, a call, or a video chat.

Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children or other relatives can't come to your home, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails, or videos. Or meet virtually on a video call.

Stick to a budget. Before you do your gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, connecting with friends and other activities. Consider whether you can shop online for any of your items. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients.

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Try these suggestions:

- Eat healthy meals.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Include regular physical activity in your daily routine.
- Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga.
- Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol, and drug use.
- Be aware of how the information culture can produce undue stress and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media as you see fit.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Find an activity you enjoy. Take a break by yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing, and restoring inner calm.

Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

How To Cope with a Difficult Family Member Over the Holidays

Simi Psychological Group

Are you needing to cope with a difficult family member during the holidays? The holidays are just around the corner and a time to celebrate and rejoice... a time to disconnect with the busy world around us and focus on spending some quality time with family. However, many people today are struggling with how to cope with a difficult family member during this time.

Interacting with a difficult family member can sometimes feel toxic, dysfunctional, and overwhelming. It may feel like someone not respecting your boundaries, being overly critical or not wanting to be a positive part of your life. It is incredibly difficult to cope with someone like this and it may make you dread the holidays and question your plans, altogether.

Prepare

The first thing you need to do when wondering how to cope with a difficult family member is to prepare. There are many things you can prepare in advance to ensure you are able to cope. First, try planning a *positive interaction*, actually visualize it. See yourself laughing and at ease and having a great time. See yourself as loved and accepted. In addition to that, you want to plan in case things get uncomfortable. First, do you have a place to escape? If you are a houseguest, are there any

other family members or friends that live close by that can provide emotional safety? *Emotional safety* is huge and necessary for growth in relationships. If you are not feeling safe emotionally, meaning... a family member is combative, dismissive, or brings up old scripts or patterns... you may feel anxious.

Or it may look like a family member drinking too much and saying things they don't mean and ruining the festivities. This is the time to think about emotional safety and utilizing an escape plan. What does that look like? It can be emotional and physical space between you and the difficult family member. It can be getting your walking shoes to take a walk on your own (don't forget your earphones and music!) Sometimes, time away can help you think.

The main thing is to protect YOUR energy. You don't want to leave your vacation feeling more depleted than relaxed and many times difficult family issues can do that.

Also remember to breathe... Diaphragmatic breathing can help ease anxiety in the moment and help you feel better. Mindfulness and meditation apps are key too!! More ways to prepare include making sure you are careful with your own alcohol consumption, language (use only language with intention) and don't get sucked into the drama. As much as you try... you can't rationalize with irrational people.

Set Limits

One thing when coping with a difficult family member is setting limits and boundaries. Sometimes these limits are not respected but know that you have a choice on how to proceed when they are not. Is this a person you want to keep in your life if the relationship is unworkable? Is the family member toxic? First...try to set limits and boundaries assertively and unapologetically.... with kindness.

Setting limits may include boundaries concerning topics of discussion. For instance, if you don't want to talk about politics, set that limit... make it known. If there is another sensitive topic, let your difficult family member know if it's off limits for you. If they persist, go back to step number 1 and consider another family ally or escape the conversation by adding physical distance (slip away to use the restroom, go for a run to the store). Also, consider limits with staying at your difficult family member's home. If it is too uncomfortable, next holiday, opt for a hotel or an alternative place to stay so you can leave whenever *you* want to.

Another important point is to avoid "fixing" your difficult family member. Let go of the need to be right (even if you truly are right) and avoid changing their minds. Many times, people who are stuck in a certain mindset, have deep beliefs, whether positive or negative... Sometimes difficult family members also will try to "bait" you and may try to evoke a reaction from you.

Do not take power plays or controlling behavior lightly, set boundaries. Protect your energy from anyone who may be intentionally trying to hurt you or instill guilt in you, manipulate you or gaslight you. Speak up with an assertive voice using "I-statements" and know that next year you have a choice who to spend your time with, especially if your limits are not respected.

Pay Attention to your Mindset

Mindset is important going into difficult relationships with family members. One thing to remember is that we can't change others... only ourselves and our reactions to others. Acceptance into who the difficult family member really is may help. People are not born "difficult" or "negative" ... and the old adage is true... "hurt people-hurt people, healed people, heal people". Something made them this way.... something they may not now (or ever) be able to talk about/process.

Prioritize YOU

When dealing with a difficult family member during the holidays... or any time, the most important thing is prioritizing your own mental health FIRST!! Many times, people report back from the holidays feeling drained because they had to walk on eggshells with their mother-in-law or had to manage their brother's moodiness, the whole time.

You don't have to be a victim to someone else's negativity. Sometimes the last option is the hardest... and that's detaching. Oftentimes, if you must cut someone out of your life...it's because they handed you the scissors. Detaching yourself is difficult but understanding that detaching from a difficult family member doesn't mean you don't love or care for them... it just means you are prioritizing your own needs and mental health.

~*HAPPY HOLIDAYS*~

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful.

10 Multicultural Holidays You May Not Be Aware Of

<https://livelearn.ca/article/about-canada/9-multicultural-holiday-celebrations-you-may-not-be-aware-of/>

How to Practice Self Soothing

https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/how-to-practice-self-soothing/id1498172564?i=1000512062233&utm_source=email&utm_medium=mm&utm_campaign=mm_4_94_1072021_opportunitysaac

Conflict Is an Opportunity

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/conflict-normal-natural-part-happily-ever/>

Keeping the Holidays Peaceful for Kids

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/helping-kids-cope/201911/keeping-the-holidays-peaceful-kids>

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous: 780-424-5900

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon/Alateen: 780-433-1818

Support Network / Referral Line: 211

Distress Line: 780 482-4357

Cocaine Anonymous: 780-425-2715

Access 24/7 – 780 424 2424

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/>