



HOLIDAY STRESS

RESOURCE TOOLKIT



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HOLIDAY STRESS

INTRO



For many, November and December are filled with holiday season activities and time off work or school, which can incite feelings of happiness and excitement and/or unease and isolation.

Expectations to attend family gatherings, travel, purchase gifts, or keep up with a growing list of events, while joy-filled, can also be very stressful. Equipping yourself with coping and stress-management strategies can help you get through the holidays and prepare for a healthy new year.

We hope this toolkit will offer the resources and knowledge you need to navigate the next few months. In December, we'll reissue this toolkit by adding more holiday-related information and will re-distribute it to help everyone prepare for healthy well-being during the end-of-year season.

**As always, call or text 988 any time
-24 hours a day, 7 days a week – for support.**



**FOR URGENT SUPPORT TEXT OR CALL 988, OR
CALL OR DOWNLOAD GCAL: 1-800-715-4225**



FOR EVERYONE



According to a 2022 American Psychiatric Association (APA) poll, nearly a third (31%) of Americans reported expecting to feel more stressed during the 2022 holiday season compared to the previous year. There are various factors contributing to heightened stress levels, but regardless of the drivers of stress, there are strategies to help manage it all.



7 WAYS TO COPE WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

PREVENT BURNOUT

It's okay to say "no" or simplify situations that may bring stress (e.g. missing a party in a week that's been too intense at work or opting for store-bought cookies, rather than homemade). Prioritize what brings joy and positive emotional energy.

TAKE A BREAK

If you'll be around family, friends, or other gatherings, it's okay to step outside or find some time for yourself away from the crowd.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness practices (such as meditation, journaling, yoga, deep breathing, and more) can be particularly helpful during the holidays.

GO OUTSIDE

Get some fresh air and sunlight! Numerous studies have pointed to the mental health benefits of spending time in nature, including stress relief, better concentration, lower levels of inflammation, and improved mental energy.

CONTINUE THERAPY

If you're currently seeing a professional – keeping scheduled therapy sessions helps ensure you've set aside time to explore any feelings that may come up during the holidays. If you'll be traveling, ask your therapist about a virtual meeting option.

AVOID FINANCIAL STRESS

If you participate in gift-giving, consider a homemade or handmade item instead of expensive gifts.



CELEBRATE THE LIVES OF THOSE YOU'VE LOST

Feelings of grief and loss during the holidays can be difficult to manage. Instead of trying to avoid thinking about your loved one, try honoring them by getting together with other family members and friends and celebrating their life stories.

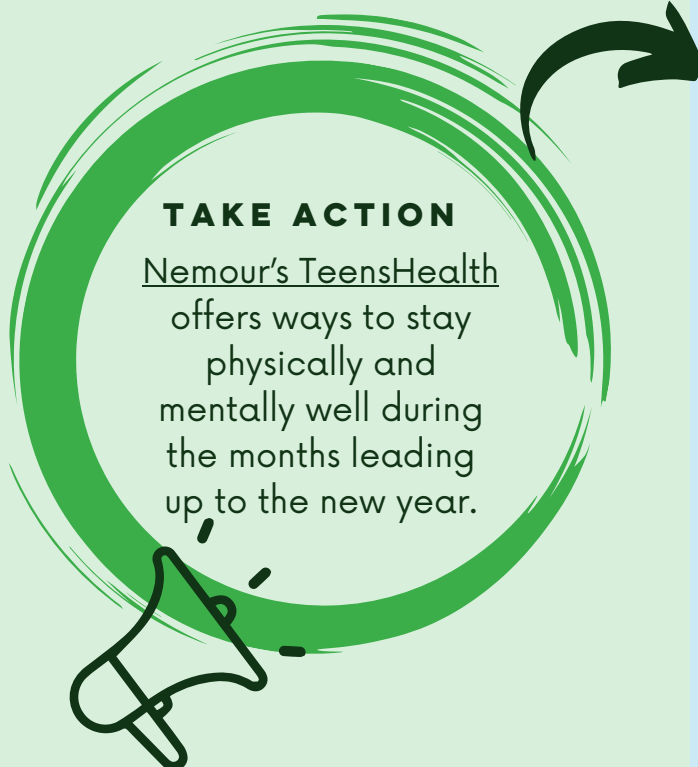
SOURCE: American Psychiatric Association (APA)

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FOR YOUTH



The “holiday blues” aren’t a myth, particularly for those living with a mental health condition. “The holiday season beams a spotlight on everything that is difficult about living with depression,” said an individual who responded to a [NAMI survey](#) about holiday stress. “The pressure to be joyful and social is tenfold.”



TAKE ACTION

[Nemour's TeensHealth](#) offers ways to stay physically and mentally well during the months leading up to the new year.

5 WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

01

FIGHT GERMS

In the fall and winter, people tend to get sick with colds and the flu. And we're still dealing with COVID-19. So protect yourself: Get a COVID-19 vaccine and the annual flu vaccine, and wash your hands a lot.

EAT HEALTHY AND BE MERRY

Holiday foods can be high in calories and low on the nutrition you need to battle germs and boost energy. Make it a priority to eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

02

03

CHILL

“Can I afford it?” “Will it be perfect?” Even things we look forward to, like the holidays, can come with worries attached. If you feel stressed, stop what you're doing for just a moment. Take 5 deep belly breaths. Concentrate on each breath as you inhale and exhale.

BEAT THE BLUES

Holiday depression doesn't just happen in songs. For some people, it's seasonal, brought on by shorter days, longer nights, and colder weather. Know your triggers and when to take a break.

04

GET SOME ZZZS

Getting 8½ to 9 hours of **sleep** a night during the holidays can help strengthen your immune system, give you more energy, and make you less vulnerable to stress.

05



READ MORE AT:
kidshealth.org/en/teens/holiday-tips.html

FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

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Parents whose families are struggling with grief and loss this holiday season may need additional support to not only manage their own stress but to help their children cope with their feelings as well. Hearing from providers who are working with bereaved parents and caregivers as well as a parent advocate to explore personal experiences can be a huge benefit in coping with grief and loss.



TAKE ACTION:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) released the "I Don't Know How to Have a Happy Holiday" video as part of their "I Don't Know How To: Parent Series" videos. This series explores difficult topics to help equip parents with the tools to navigate and provide support for various mental health conditions.



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FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



BONUS ACTION:

A helpful four-page guide, also from NCTSN, titled "Supporting Children and Teens During This Holiday Season"



NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND TEENS DURING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season is upon us. Families are dealing with stress from multiple sources, including navigating how to safely gather given current COVID-19 safety protocols, and may not be able to celebrate the holidays as usual. Many families have recently experienced the death of a family member making this holiday season even more challenging as we think about those that can't be with us this year. Although parents/caregivers may feel the need to do more to "make up" for such a difficult year, remember, more is not always better. Decide as a family how you will make each holiday special this year.

Given these changes, adults and children may experience waves of sadness, disappointment, loneliness, grief, and anger. It is important to not feel alone with these feelings, to have your feelings supported and validated by others, and to know that in the midst of these difficult times, you can create moments of joy, hope, and connection. While some traditions may have to shift, this is also an opportunity to create new family traditions together.

STRATEGIES AND IDEAS FOR THIS HOLIDAY SEASON: Finding ways to make this year special

Start a Family Conversation: Acknowledge What Has Changed and How Family Members are Feeling

- Talk to your children/teens about this holiday season.
- Help them understand why things may remain different this year. You may want to share that you are doing things differently because you want to keep everyone safe and healthy.
- Let them talk about their feelings, what they are sad about, what makes them upset.
 - Let them know that they are not alone. You hear them.
 - Validate their feelings. It makes sense that they are feeling sad, disappointed, frustrated, angry . . . because the holidays are not the same, because they miss friends and family . . .
 - Even when you can't "fix" things, you are giving children the gift of your support.
- If loved ones have died during this year, find a way to honor their memory this holiday season and find ways to share your feelings as a family.
- Think together about your family values and traditions related to the holidays (the way you celebrate may still be different, but the meaning behind the holiday does not).

This project was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

FOR EDUCATORS & PROFESSIONALS



Your mindset can dictate (and activate) your body's stress response. If you feel yourself going into a negative mindset, try to guide your thoughts back to the positive and stay in the present moment through mindful moments. Wondering how to practice mindfulness during the hustle and bustle of holidays?

The Child Mind Institute offers tips for how to enjoy the holidays with more mindfulness. Try to incorporate "mindful moments" with your students prior to extended time away from the classroom. This will build a habit of mindfulness to carry into the holiday season.

The screenshot shows the top of a webpage from Child Mind Institute. The header includes the logo, navigation links (Care, Education, Science), and utility links (About Us, Global, Ways to Give, en Español, a search icon, and a yellow Donate button). Below the header is a blue banner with the article title "Enjoy the Holidays More With Mindfulness by Jill Emanuele, PhD" and buttons for "Download" and "Share". The main content area features a list of four bullet points providing mindfulness tips. On the right side, there is a "More Like This" section with three links and a "Topics" section with one link. A red notification bell icon is visible in the bottom left corner of the article content area.

Child Mind Institute Care Education Science About Us Global Ways to Give en Español [Donate](#)

Enjoy the Holidays More With Mindfulness by Jill Emanuele, PhD [Download](#) [Share](#)

- Find a quiet place for just a few minutes (I sometimes recommend the bathroom, as for some people this is the only quiet spot!). Get yourself into a comfortable sitting position with your feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing only. Do this for a few minutes. Listen to the sound of your breath and notice how your body feels during this time. When thoughts of other moments come racing into your mind, acknowledge them and let them go by as if they are on a conveyor belt, and refocus your attention on your breath again. Do this over and over.
- Spend a few minutes each day writing down five things you are thankful for that day.
- When you are walking outside, focus on one of your senses. For example, for vision, notice the colors of objects around you or for hearing, listen to the sounds around you and label them nonjudgmentally (eg "That building is gray," or "I hear a horn honking").
- [Get the kids involved!](#) One favorite thing I like to recommend is good old fashioned bubble blowing. Make a game out of it and instruct them (and yourself) to silently watch the bubbles float around the room. Resist the urge to pop the bubbles and see where they go.

More Like This

- ▶ [How Mindfulness Can Help Caregivers](#)
- ▶ [The Power of Mindfulness](#)
- ▶ [How to Make Holidays Kid-Friendly](#)

Topics

- ▶ [Family Issues](#)



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