

CTA Wellness Presents

CTA EAP Holiday Happiness *No More Humbugs*

with Presenter Jenny Farrell

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Holiday blues are a temporary change in mood related to a particular set of circumstances.

In this online seminar, we'll discuss how the holiday season can affect our emotions, review factors that contribute to or trigger holiday blues, and learn self-care strategies that can help during the holidays.



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Live Well
Work Well 

MY HOLIDAY SELF-CARE PLAN

Holiday Happiness: Don't Let the Humbugs Bite

There are many possible challenges during the holidays. What do you struggle with? Identify at least three stressors (they don't have to be on the list), and think about a positive way that you can respond to or get ahead of each of those struggles. Taking it a step further, think about how your personal best possible holiday might look. Use this as a roadmap to begin finding the joy of the season again.

Identify struggle #1: _____

What could you do proactively to reduce or eliminate that stressor this year?

Identify struggle #2: _____

What could you do proactively to reduce or eliminate that stressor this year?

Identify struggle #3: _____

What could you do proactively to reduce or eliminate that stressor this year?

My perfect "not so perfect" holiday

Which aspects could you embrace right now?

Which aspects might require compromise with others?

What will you strive to make true in the future? How will you do that?

Common holiday stressors

- › Unrealistic expectations
- › Trapped by traditions
- › Family issues and conflict
- › Time management
- › Overspending or debt
- › Eating or drinking too much
- › People-pleasing
- › Memories of past pain and loss
- › Feeling guilty about level of giving
- › Trying to accomplish too much
- › Arguments with partner
- › Children's expectations
- › Committing to too much
- › Being alone; feeling lonely
- › Overwhelmed by guests
- › Getting too exhausted
- › Not finding joy in it
- › Post-holiday letdown

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MANAGING THE CHALLENGES OF CORONAVIRUS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Holiday Happiness: Don't Let the Humbugs Bite

As the pandemic continues to reshape our lives, the holiday season will likely look somewhat different. Traditions and norms may be upended. Loved ones we enjoy celebrating with may not be able to attend this year. Travel and close gatherings may be impacted. Along with the standard stressors of the season, many of us may be feeling deeper, more challenging emotions, such as grief, worry, or anxiety. Review the tips below for strategies on managing difficult emotions during the holidays this year:

Coping with change and uncertainty:

Holidays are built on traditions, many of which may be upended this year. We may experience a sense of loss – loss of normalcy, social connections, and more. When plans and expectations aren't what we're used to, it can bring up feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.

- › **Allow your feelings.** Dealing with change or loss of this nature brings with it a grieving process. Coping with a change in our expectations or visions for the future can make you feel unsteady. This is normal. Acknowledge the feelings and remind yourself of how you've coped with other difficult situations during the pandemic thus far.
- › **Adjust your expectations.** A re-creation of past holiday gatherings may not be possible this year. Zero in on what will be most meaningful to you and your family, rather than things you felt obligated to do in the past. Be open to the idea of creating new memories and traditions. This year of all years, try to let go of perfection. Remind yourself the disruptions won't be for forever.
- › **Plan ahead.** Refer to recommendations from the CDC and local public health officials when determining what type of gathering you're comfortable hosting or attending. If you're traveling, consider how you will travel and where you will stay. If you are hosting, determine how many people you are comfortable with inviting, how food will be served, and expectations surrounding distancing or conduct.
- › **Think "flexibility."** The holidays are notorious for "curveballs" even in normal times. Prepare for plans to change abruptly. Attendees may need to cancel due to illness or safety concerns. You may need to shift plans to accommodate your own or others' challenges. Expect the unexpected this year.

- › **Find creative ways to preserve meaning and tradition.** If food is an important part of your holiday traditions, consider socially distanced food exchanges with family members or neighbors. If a gathering is virtual, consider having a shared activity for those who attend. Examples include enjoying a meal together, having a fun theme, games, or even religious or spiritual events.
- › **Break down big challenges into smaller, "bite-size" goals you can tackle.** If you're hosting a virtual event this year, a small goal might be familiarizing yourself with the virtual platform. Take one issue at a time, writing out what is required and how you might meet the challenge.
- › **Take a time-out from worry or obligation.** Recognize when you are starting to feel stressed or anxious, and have a plan to help you relax and step away for a moment. Take a breath, or a quiet cup of tea. Find something soothing to help you recharge and nurture yourself.

Navigating tension:

Tension and conflict can be present during the holidays during the best of times. This year, differing approaches to safety measures can add to strained relationships.

- › **It's okay to set limits about who you see and when.** Check current recommendations from the CDC or local public health officials. Set boundaries you feel comfortable with to keep you and your family safe and healthy.
- › **Give advanced notice so visitors can adapt.** Be open and honest. Spell out your expectations around pandemic precautions, such as face coverings or required distancing at in-person events.

- › **Avoid judgment.** If you will not attend a gathering, use “I” statements to explain why: “I feel it’s important for us to avoid travel this year, so we won’t be able to attend Thanksgiving this year.” Do not express judgment over how others are handling the situation. If you are hosting, be respectful of others’ choices on whether or not to attend, even if you disagree.
- › **Keep the focus on your feelings and comfort level.** Do not let the conversation descend into a debate or argument on the seriousness of the virus or other “charged” subjects.
- › **Allow others to feel heard.** Feelings may be hurt about changed plans, both from extended family or friends and in your own family. Acknowledge those feelings, and share your own sadness and disappointment. Suggest alternative ways to celebrate, such as a virtual gathering.
- › **Look for stories of inspiration to inspire hope.** It may feel more challenging to see the positives this year. Look to your family, friends, and your community for examples of resilience: ways to come together through challenges, local volunteer or charity work, or stories of hope and kindness.
- › **Reach out to others for help and support.** Talk out your thoughts, challenges, and fears with others, such as friends or close family members. Think about who could be helpful as a giver of perspective, as a problem-solver, or simply as a sympathetic listener. You might consider enlisting the help of a professional counselor through your EAP to talk through difficult feelings surrounding the pandemic and/or the holidays.

Managing difficult emotions:

This time may cause complex emotions: discouragement, feeling “flat,” a deflated spirit, even depression. If you’ve lost a family member, grief or sadness may surge during this time. It is important to prioritize your emotional wellness to cope.

- › **Take care of yourself.** Adequate sleep helps your body renew its resources. Exercise can provide a boost of endorphins and other chemicals that improve our mood. Eating well-balanced, regular meals ensures you have the energy to cope with new challenges. These routines can be pushed aside during the hustle and bustle of the holidays, but they are important to combat difficult emotions.
- › **Offering support/assistance to others** helps change your emotional focus. You can feel part of the solution rather than just a victim of circumstance. Reach out to a neighbor who you know is alone during the holidays, or drop off a meal or holiday treat to someone who is having a tough time.
- › **If you’re alone for the holiday, plan activities that you enjoy.** Watch favorite holiday movies or an old TV series. Make a phone date with a friend or family member. Indulge in your favorite foods.
- › **See if you can find the “silver linings” to the changes this year.** Perhaps less pressure to put on the “perfect holiday.” Or having more time for activities you enjoy with fewer obligations. Focusing on small bits of positivity can help keep negativity from overwhelming you.

Supporting children

Changes to holiday traditions can be hard for children. What can you do to support them?

- › **Explain holiday plans and what will be different this year.** Give plenty of warning of the changes. Be prepared with an answer for the “Why?” questions.
- › **Set expectations for gatherings if you see others in person.** Explain the “rules” surrounding hugging, maintaining distance, and other behaviors.
- › **Address concerns or feelings.** Expect disappointment, sadness, or even anger when children can’t attend an event or see a loved one. Be honest about your own feelings, but keep your own stress in check.
- › **Letting kids help with holiday planning and preparations** – decorating, baking cookies, and other activities – gives them a small sense of control when so much is in flux.
- › **Focus on positive, meaningful connections.** Help them see what they can look forward to with this year’s festivities. Plan a fun virtual activity they can engage in with loved ones, like opening gifts or eating a meal “together.”
- › **Remember, kids are resilient!** They can get through this – and so can you.

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COPING WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Holiday Happiness: Don't Let the Humbugs Bite

The holiday season can be a particularly vulnerable time when struggling with grief. You may feel overcome with sadness and memories of your loved one, particularly during events or traditions where that person “should” be in attendance. It can feel like being blindsided by your feelings. Here are some tips on taking care of yourself during the holidays.

- › **Know that it's normal for grief to surge during these times.** Be prepared for the reality that times that used to bring much happiness may now bring increased sadness.
- › **Allow your feelings.** To get to the other side of painful feelings we must go through them. A person who attempts to avoid or “stuff” these feelings may delay the process. Remember to also give yourself permission to feel good. Being happy doesn't mean you're being disloyal to the memory of your loved one. In fact, it's likely what they'd want that for you.
- › **Plan ahead.** Do you want to spend the day alone or with others? Do old traditions bring comfort or would you like to try something new? You might just have activities and people on standby and decide as you go. Arrange your schedule in a way that allows space to grieve if needed.
- › **Alert others who care about you that this may be a particularly difficult time.** Look for supportive people to lend a listening ear: friends, family, your faith community, your doctor, a professional counselor, your EAP, or a grief support group.
- › **Be mindful of sadness triggers.** Holiday music, a particular place, or even a decoration may trigger memories. If it seems too difficult, choose not to listen to holiday music or attend certain events. If it brings you joy, embrace it.
- › **Consider including your lost loved one in some special way.** Light a special candle. Place a picture of them in a prominent place. Make a favorite treat that they liked. You might make these remembrances a new family or holiday tradition.
- › **Be proactive about loneliness.** You may not wish to celebrate the holidays, but try to find ways to avoid feeling cut off. Just being around others, such as going to a concert or shopping can help you feel connected. You might meet a friend for lunch or volunteer for a cause. This can bring a sense of connection and feel uplifting.
- › **Try to stay in the present.** Reminiscing is fine, even comforting, but try not to stay there. You might try a journal. Write out memories and feelings, then tuck it away and bring yourself back to now.

Supporting children grieving during the holidays

- › **Let them know that their feelings are okay.** Ask open-ended questions to invite them to talk about how they feel, but don't push. Let them know it's all right to laugh and feel happy too.
- › **Give them opportunities to reminisce.** This might be sharing memories together, making a memory book, or coming up with a new ritual.
- › **Give them some control.** Death leaves us feeling very powerless. Let them take over some holiday tasks or volunteer to help others.

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CELEBRATING THE HEALTHY WAY

Holiday Happiness: Don't Let the Humbugs Bite

As the holiday season approaches, many people anticipate times of happiness, good cheer, and excitement shared with friends and family. However, holidays can also bring feelings of anxiety, stress, sadness, and disappointment. These tips may help improve your mood and reduce feelings of stress.

- › **Eat and drink in moderation.** It's easy to find yourself eating more than you normally would because of the abundance of food. Try to keep your portions small, and avoid the richest foods. Watch how much alcohol you use, as excessive alcohol use can increase feelings of depression.
- › **Have and stick to a budget.** Overspending can sneak up on you during the holidays. Decide in advance what you can comfortably afford to spend on gifts, entertaining, decorations, and travel. Make choices within the reality of this budget to avoid the stress that often comes with post-holiday debt.
- › **Connect with others.** If you're alone for the holidays, find ways to engage. Try inviting others to get together, call a friend, or take a volunteer shift for a cause that matters to you. This helps you connect with people and get the benefits of lending a hand.
- › **Make time for regular exercise.** If you already exercise, try to keep your regular schedule despite the busyness of the season. If you don't exercise, try incorporating some light activity into your daily routine. Even a short walk with a friend can help reduce stress and boost your mood.
- › **Don't expect a perfect holiday.** Unrealistic expectations can add to stress levels. Accept that you can't control every variable. Negotiate new approaches to yearly stressors, then try to shift your energy into enjoying the days as they unfold.
- › **Take a good look at your holiday traditions.** Are there any traditions or activities that can be modified? Complicated meals and elaborate gift giving can raise your stress and anxiety levels. Consider simplifying your meals and celebrations.
- › **Remember lost loved ones through positive memories.** We can miss those who are gone even more during holiday festivities. Talking and sharing good memories of them and the times you shared can be comforting and keep the memories alive.
- › **Find time to relax.** Re-energize by getting away from the pressures of the holidays, even if only for a short break. You might have a quiet cup of tea or take a nap, a hot bath, or a refreshing walk. What helps you recharge and feel calmer?
- › **Plan ahead.** Not waiting until the last minute to finish holiday preparations can save you time, money and stress. Also, try making some fun plans for after the holidays to reduce the effects of a possible post-holiday letdown.

If you're feeling down or stressed, give some of these self-help strategies a try. However, if you feel down for more than a few weeks, or if you're experiencing changes in sleeping or eating patterns, talk to your health care provider.

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