

Holiday Mental Health

December 2020 Employee Assistance Program Newsletter



**MAINTAINING
MENTAL
HEALTH
DURING THE
HOLIDAYS**

With the fast approaching winter holidays and a global pandemic still looming behind us, it is vital to remain vigilant and support our mental health and well-being during these upcoming weeks. According to surveys and consumer data conducted by the Canadian Mental Health Association since the pandemic had begun, patterns reveal that anxiety levels fluctuated during the course of the pandemic. It was highest in the spring and late fall, and lowest over the summer months, whereas symptoms of depression and loneliness remained relatively stable. With all these already existing stressors, the holidays especially can be a riskier time of year for one's mental health.

Whether it's increased demands at work, expectations placed on ourselves or on family members, memories of loved ones who have passed, or the temptation to use less than healthy coping strategies during this time, each of these can cause significant stress if not managed effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that we maintain our mental health and wellness, and it is also imperative to practice skills to boost the means with which we can deal with these stressors.



EAP: 1-800-668-2055 OR 604-683-3255



Make plans and plan ahead

The act and process of planning and scheduling is an important coping mechanism of daily life. However, the uncertainty of the pandemic's spread during the first half of the year has made it difficult to predict whether anything will happen as we imagined it might. The control that we practiced and relied on in daily life have become more fragile than we estimated.

According to recent studies at North Carolina State University, it is important to make plans, and to keep making them - whether we believe they are futile or not. Make plans from the mundane to the imaginative, but ensure that our plans lie within safety guidelines. This may mean creating healthy boundaries with people who may bring stress or tension into our holidays. Don't be afraid to decline invitations or take some time for yourself if need be. Uncertainty causes stress, but planning as a means of proactive coping gives us back the control we need to handle potential hardships and makes us less reactive.



Create new traditions

Many people feel pressured to have the perfect holiday season. This can lead to additional stress and eventual disappointment if reality doesn't match our ideal. Make an effort to dial down the expectation of a picture-perfect celebration and enjoy simple, affordable traditions. For example, you could make a donation to a local charity or volunteer your time to help those less fortunate.

New traditions can also be formed. These new traditions might be ones that are even more in line with our deeper values. Tap into your creativity. If you are spending some of your holiday time with your children and/or other family members, ask them for their ideas on how to celebrate the holidays differently. Some families celebrate early, while others plan to celebrate when the hustle and bustle winds down.



Moderation and Maintenance

This is also the time of year where more people are exposed to alcohol or other substances. Higher than usual levels of binge drinking was reported by the Canadian Mental Health Association in a survey conducted over the course of the pandemic.

To cope with temptation or to avoid high-risk situations entirely, it is therefore important to recognise the situations where you might be at risk to use these substances. Learning your limit and learning to say no, especially when zero is your limit, is key to building a foundation not only for one's recovery but for maintaining good mental health. If you've found a routine that is beneficial to you, don't let the holidays interrupt the habits that help you feel grounded. Take time to eat balanced meals, exercise, or sleep at a reasonable time to reduce your stress level that can trigger the use of these substances.



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Resolutions and Professional Help

It can take great strength to reclaim our mental health, to act accordingly instead of instinctively to our conditioned reactions. Results from the CMHA also show that 19.4 percent of participants reported seeking help for mental health concerns from a counsellor or health care provider (online or in person) at least once over the course of the pandemic. Working on your mental health goes hand-in-hand with working towards your life goals, whatever they may be. Make good on your resolutions in the new year by making specific and attainable goals that can give back the control you need for improving and maintaining your mental health. Sometimes these small steps could include seeking professional help. For those struggling with heightened anxiety during the holidays and after, seek professional help from your EAP or other resources below:

HealthLink BC:
Provides 24/7, confidential health information and advice. Call 8-1-1 or visit: healthlinkbc.ca.

Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre:
Call 604 872-3311 (Greater Vancouver), or toll-free 1 800 SUICIDE (784-2433), or visit: crisiscentre.bc.ca.

The KUU-US Crisis Response Service:
Provides 24/7 culturally-aware crisis support to Indigenous people in B.C. Call 1-800-588-8717 or visit: kuu-uscrisisline.ca.

MindHealthBC: visit mindhealthbc.ca for information and recommendations for further support in Vancouver, Richmond and other coastal communities.

Substance Use Services: B.C. has a network of direct and contracted services for people experiencing substance-use challenges, including withdrawal management and prevention programs. Call toll-free: 1 866 658-1221.

For Youth: **Mental Health Digital Hub:** gov.bc.ca/mentalhealth. **Bounce Back:** Call toll-free: 1 866 639-0522 or visit: bouncebackbc.ca.