

# HOLIDAY Stress

For many, the ideal holiday season means goodwill, giving and receiving gifts, family togetherness, and endless good cheer. All too often, the result is unmet expectations accompanied by tension and disappointment.

## SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE THE HOLIDAY SEASON LESS STRESSFUL

### Do not buy into the holiday myth of the perfect family.

Give yourself and everyone else permission to feel and behave less than perfectly. On the other hand, do not exclude yourself from the pleasures of the season by dwelling on the negative aspects of the holidays.

### Take everything in stride.

Expect that the intensity of togetherness at the holidays will result in some irritability and take it in stride. Recognize that the holiday is not ruined because someone gets angry or upset.

Do not try to over-control all interactions. Your family is doing what it always does, acting like your family.

### Avoid holiday confrontations.

Holidays can be used to make meaningful contact with family members. However, in a couple of days you cannot mend the damage done throughout the year. If you have bad feelings about someone, try to avoid that person. This is not the time to confront family members and attempt to change their behaviours, such as their drinking patterns.

### Create new rituals.

Holidays can be difficult for families where there has been a death or divorce. This is especially true for children of divorced parents. Ensure that there is not competition for their time and affection. Create new rituals, blending in elements that have shared meaning for all current members.

### Do not forget those less fortunate.

Share your abundance or volunteer to help the less fortunate and remember that a lonely family member or neighbour would appreciate a visit or an invitation to join your family.

### Make time for grief.

If you have experienced the death of a family member or friend during the year, the holidays may be a difficult time. Make time to grieve, which is a natural response to loss, and seek support when necessary.



## Be flexible.

While holiday traditions can be comforting and reassuring, they can equally become stressful if they pressure you into adopting old rules. Family members grow and change and so should traditions and rituals.

Try to be flexible about the way things are done. Give yourself permission to try a new role and respond positively to change in other family members.

## Reduce stress.

If recently you, or a member of your family, have been experiencing a lot of stress, such as a health problem or a career change, perhaps you should consider opting out of some of the holiday activities and using the time for reflection and recuperation. Do not put pressure on someone who is ill, or under a lot of stress, to be jovial.

## Do not overburden yourself.

If you are in charge of organizing any of the holiday events, enlist the help of others. Well in advance, delegate specific tasks to other family members. Everyone will enjoy the occasion more. Plan for difficult moments and have diversions handy such as board games and outdoor activities.

## Do not overspend.

Recognize that in both tough and good times, it is the thought that counts, not how much money is spent. Avoid giving into children's demands for everything, regardless of the cost. Setting a spending limit is a way to relieve stress. Those who care about us would prefer our affection and time to our money. Getting a gift for someone that is meaningful and personal can show your love. Discuss with your family drawing names for gifts and / or limiting the amount spent on each gift. Look at less materialistic ways to spend the holidays.

## Do not overindulge, eat sensibly.

If overindulgence is a problem, head for low-calorie foods as well as the non-alcoholic drinks. Fasting all day prior to the big holiday meal will only increase the likelihood of a binge. Remember to eat sensibly throughout the day.

## Use discretion.

Do not feel obligated to watch every holiday special, nor accept every invitation. Tune out and drop out when you feel it is necessary. Do make an effort to enjoy what you feel are the positives of the season - for example, the lights, the music, and an opportunity to sleep in.

## Reflect on the season.

For some, the holidays provide an important opportunity for spiritual traditions. It is a season of reflection for people of many faiths. Allow the spirit of the season to be present in whatever way is right for you.



If you have the holiday blues and do not seem able to shake them,  
you may need help in sorting out your feelings.  
Remember, your EFAP is just a phone call away!