



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Ho Ho Holiday Stress and What to Do About it

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Holidays can bring to life the most magical family times and memories, but they can also shine a light on grief, disappointment, and troubled relationships that don't disappear when the holiday decorations come out. Idealized images in movies, catalogues, and even Facebook posts can give the impression that everyone is stress-free and deliriously happy; and if you're not, then there's something wrong with you.

However, what's more true is that many people feel overwhelmed by expectations, commitments, increasing debt, and strained family gatherings that holidays can bring. And while the season can be joyous with religious rituals and cultural celebrations, it can also trigger difficult memories of past family holidays, loneliness, and challenge sobriety for those struggling with addiction.

As you imagine the holidays ahead, consider some of these strategies to ease your stress and help you enjoy this season in a way that focuses on your own personal values and style.

Set realistic expectations

Does your house need to look like a Pottery Barn store or your childhood home? Does everything need to be home-cooked? Can you afford to buy your child that \$500 game system?

- Pick a handful of essential holiday components—religious rituals, décor, meals, treats, events--and let the rest go
- Consider simplifying shared meals or making them potlucks
- If you want to host, plan ahead and ask for help with meal preparation and clean up

Lighten your financial burden

- Make and stick to a budget—for future holidays, try to shop throughout the year if you can to prevent a huge Visa bill in January
- Set cost limits with kids' gifts to decrease the chance of overspending
- Consider drawing names for family gifts—this can be a great way to involve children and lessen the financial load on everyone
- Shop online to avoid last minute impulse purchases in person

Remember the past, but try not to stay there

If your family holidays were painful, try to put them aside and consciously develop your own traditions to make new memories.

- Go to an annual holiday community event, make your own gifts, adopt a family for the holidays, bring cookies to elderly folks at a senior facility, have an ugly holiday sweater party and raise money for a children's charity, set up a scavenger hunt for gifts, play games and make pizza, watch the same holiday movie with the same special meal—my family watches National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation and eats turkey pot pies—what would your movie choice and meal be?

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Don't overcommit yourself

Trying to please everyone rarely works and results in spreading yourself too thin and becoming overwhelmed.

- Make choices—you don't have to do everything and accept every invitation
- Prioritize—decide what's important to you during this season, and be sure it's at the top of your list
- Self-care—set aside time just for yourself to exercise, relax, and do what recharges you

Ask for help

- If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, struggling with depression or loneliness, or reliving painful family holidays, don't suffer alone. Reach out to a friend, family member, religious community, or your EAP—we can offer support on the phone or in-person to get you through this challenging time. You don't have to go it alone. Call the EAP at (800) 777-4114 for help.

With the holiday spirit moving us to focus on others, we encourage you to take some time this season to also care yourself. By doing so, you can lower your stress while still honoring what's important to you and your family – and maybe even create a little holiday magic of your own!



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