



Kinship Link

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Pro Kinship for Kids

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Coping with Holiday Stress

The holidays are a time for family and cheer, but making sure the house is clean, the food is ready, and the presents are wrapped and ready to be opened can be overwhelming. These factors can bring unwanted stress and depression in a time meant for happiness. Take control of your holidays. Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures, or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays. Just keep in mind when stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past. Use some of these important practical tips to help minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. These tips may even help you enjoy the holidays more than expected.

- 1. Plan Ahead.** Between co-workers, friends, and family, it's inevitable that some commitments will end up on the same day. Make sure to plan on what you can attend in person or virtually. If you're hosting the holidays, create a menu to help you stay organized and make grocery shopping easier. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends, and other activities. Plan your menus, and then make your shopping list. That will help prevent last minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients and gifts. For more fun, get others to join in your efforts. Make sure to line up help for meal prep and clean up. Plan at least one thing in your week that you look forward to after the holidays too, so you don't get through the holidays and then have nothing left.
- 2. Say No.** With holiday commitments, it is OK to say no to a few or all of them. It also will help relieve some stress, to say no. Try sharing your to-do list with other family members. Learning to say no and saying yes when you should have said no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
- 3. Plan Spending and Stick to a Budget.** The holidays mean spending money. Make a budget and stick to it. Spending money on your loved ones is important, but it's also important to pay your energy bill. Don't buy gifts that you'll be paying off for the rest of the year. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend and then stick to your budget. Consider alternatives, such as donating to a charity in someone's name, giving homemade gifts, or starting a family gift exchange.
- 4. Create Relaxing Surroundings.** Turn

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on some music, light some candles, or open the windows on a sunny day. Research has found that listening to music and the scent of citrus can boost feeling of well-being, and Vitamin D is always a happiness booster.

5. **Maintain Healthy Habits.** A short workout each morning will help your decision-making throughout the day. Encourage your family to try snow shoeing or sledding to get in extra exercise in the winter. Movement is great for stress and depression. Anything is good for your health exercise, walk the dog, dance, or clean to your favorite music. Even learn more about exercise and fitness to find your stress outlet. Eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit or vegetables throughout the season and fill up on some fruits and vegetables before a dinner party or celebration with all that tempting, but unhealthy, foods. The healthy snacks before holiday parties will help you avoid going overboard on sweets, cheese, or drinks. Get plenty of sleep. Take a time each day to do something relaxing. Start a new hobby. Get back on track with eating and exercise. Include regular physical activity in your daily routine, try deep-breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga to continue to calm yourself. Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol, and drug use. Be aware of how much the information culture can produce undue stress, and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media as you see fit.
6. **Share Feelings and Acknowledge your Feelings.** Spending a holiday after a loss in the family can be difficult. Accept your feelings and open up about them to others. It may make you feel better to share. Try to switch up old traditions to ease the loss. Realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or

express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season. Volunteering your time or doing something to help others in memory of the loved one can lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal or dessert at a friend's home during the holidays.

7. **Respect Differences.** Family members will have different viewpoints than your own. Try your best to forgive and forget this holiday season. Focus on your similarities, and replace tension with something productive. Accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until after the holidays when it might be a more appropriate time for discussion. Also, be understanding if others get upset or distressed. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
8. **Be Realistic.** You are only one person, and you can only do so much. Be realistic with how much you can handle this season. Forget about perfection, and relax and enjoy the company surrounding you.
9. **Take a Break, Take a Breather, and Have Fun.** Don't forget about your own needs. Take a nap, go for a short walk, read a book, or watch a funny movie. Laughing relaxes the whole body, and can relieve physical tension and stress. Take the time you need to do things you find relaxing or fun. Watch your favorite movie for the 100th time. Take an evening drive to look at lights, or curl up with a hot chocolate and a good book. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Make this time for yourself a must. Find an activity you enjoy. Take a break by yourself. Spending just 15 minutes, without distractions,

may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing, and restoring inner calm.

10. **Reach Out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events, as they can offer support and companionship. Work at a food shelf, organize a gift drive, read to a child, or help your neighbor. Reaching out to others makes us feel good about ourselves and reminds us that we aren't alone in facing challenges.
11. **Let Go of Expectations.** Don't feel you need to live up to the unrealistic expectations depicted in the media or on social media. Doing too many things, spending too much money, or eating or drinking too much can lead to even greater feelings of despair. Think simple. It's okay to say no during any time of the year. Don't get so locked into your traditions that you lose sight of the most important part: Spending time together.

Holidays are meant to be a fun, enjoyable times with friends and family. These tips can help ensure you truly enjoy your holidays when stress starts to set in. This year, enjoy the holidays and whatever comes after.

