

Seasonal survival tips

The weeks from just before Thanksgiving to just after New Year's Day arguably constitute the most stressful time of the year. While the season can hold many positives, such as quality time with family and friends, it can also be fraught with pressures. It doesn't help that advertising and pop culture portray a holiday ideal that is impossible to live up to, creating unrealistic expectations.

There are many seasonal traps, too. Festivities can be fun, but can also tempt us to stray dangerously from our normal eating, drinking, exercise and sleep habits. Plus, any fault lines we have in our lives seem to intensify – loneliness, grief, separation, family dynamics and more. So, while holidays can hold joys for many, the flip side can be intense.

We asked our counselors to share their best tips for surviving the holiday season with minimal stress. Here's what they said:

Be a giver not a taker. Reach out to someone in need – an elderly neighbor, someone who has suffered a loss, or someone away from home. Spread joy through random acts of kindness.

Put down the devices and turn off the electronics. Phones, tablets, TVs and electronic games can keep us connected, but they can also divide us. Make a “no-electronics” rule at special meals and gatherings.

Keep realistic expectations. Things won't always go according to plan. You aren't perfect, and neither are your friends or family. Embrace imperfection. Relax.

Stick to a “Ho, Ho, Ho” philosophy. Laughter, humor and a positive attitude can cover a multitude of sins. Laughter and smiles are deeply contagious.



Be flexible. Traditions change as families expand. Roll with the changes, add new traditions to replace the old and remember that it's about people and sharing, not rituals.

Set limits. Don't be afraid to say no. Be selective about the engagements you accept and the commitments you make. Edit down to the things that are most important to you and those you love.

Avoid touchy topics that will lead to conflict. What's the topical third rail in your household – Politics? Religion? Sports rivalries? Steer clear of topics that lead to arguments. If you can't do that, then practice tolerance. Give people the benefit of the doubt.

Practice self-care. Stick to exercise routines and healthy eating. Find a little quiet space in each day.

Forgive and forget. The holidays are the perfect time to free yourself from the burden of old resentments, quarrels and grudges. Forgiveness is liberating and a gift to both the forgiver and the forgiven.

Ask for help. If you have too much on your plate, reach out to friends and family to share the burden. If things get to be too much or problems surface, remember that 365 days a year 24-7, your EAP can help -- just pick up the phone and give us a call.