



Eye on Safety

Finding Your "Joy" During the Holiday Season

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For this month's Eye on Safety, we want to recognize that our mental health is just as important as our physical well-being.

People often describe the holiday season as “the most wonderful time of the year” filled with family, friends, celebrations, traditions, and good cheer. If “’tis the season to be jolly” isn’t always the way you feel during the holiday season, you’re not alone. For many, the holidays bring the holiday blues or just plain stress. Stress comes from unrealistic expectations, having too many gifts to buy in too short a time, crowded stores, family conflicts, financial worries, fears, or sadness about being alone.

There will always be factors that are beyond your control, but you don’t have to be a victim of the season. With some shift in your thinking and attitude, it’s possible to let go of the blues and overcome stress. You can turn this time of year into a more pleasant and happy occasion. Below are six keys to being more resilient during the holidays.

1. Plan ahead to feel more in control. One of the worst kinds of stress is when you don’t feel in control. To avoid this, plan ahead and be realistic with your time. Make a budget, write out your list of gifts, and other holiday chores that need to get done. Then attack the list early: what can you get done this week; today? If you have too much to do, can you get help? If not, consider shortening your list. The more realistic you are with your expectations of yourself, the less stress you will experience. Also, when you plan ahead, your decisions are less emotionally based, and tend to be better choices.
2. Make sure it’s your agenda. The holidays are often filled with perceived obligations. Make conscious decisions about those obligations. Make sure they are your choices, not someone else’s. Could you send fewer holiday cards, visit relatives on a different day, or agree with friends to go out to dinner or do a potluck rather than doing all the cooking?
3. Mindfulness. Be mindful of what you are paying attention to and realize that you have a choice. If the main thing we focus on is pleasant, then we will probably feel good. On the other hand, if we focus on what is negative in the situation, we will more likely feel annoyed and upset. Thus, your perspective determines, to a great extent, how you will feel in a situation—happy or sad, good or bad, and how much stress you will experience. You don’t want to ignore a problem but try spending more time focusing on the positive.
4. Make Time to Connect. Connection and meaning are critical to our mental health. The holiday season accentuates the discomfort of being alone. Don’t wait until the last minute to call friends or make plans. Take the initiative to find those in similar

circumstances, people that you know or would like to know better or plan some other activities.

5. **Maintain Healthy Habits.** For many people, the holidays lead to a massive disruption in your day-to-day routine. But maintaining healthy habits like eating healthy, getting enough sleep and exercising are critical to keeping your mental health on track.
6. **Set Boundaries.** People like to be generous during the holidays, but that generosity doesn't have to come at the expense of having healthy boundaries. If hosting an event or buying an expensive gift is too stressful, it's OK to say no. It's also OK to limit the time you spend with family that you may have a complicated dynamic with.

This holiday season — whether you find it to be the most wonderful or most difficult time of the year — take care of your mental health by accepting whatever emotions come up, maintaining healthy habits, setting boundaries on stressors and making time for meaningful connection.

If you need support or assistance with connecting to professional help, you can contact the Kentucky Employee Assistance Program (KEAP). KEAP is a free, confidential service available to all state employees and their families. 1-800-445-KEAP
