

GRAYMIND PSYCHOLOGY



A GRAYMIND RESOURCE

Handling the Holidays



Here are some of our top tips for managing the holiday season and some of the challenges it may bring. As well as how to get the most out of your time off and set yourself up with some behavioural change in the new year!



TIP ONE

Be aware of your stressors and manage them effectively.

Typically the holiday season can be a time filled with joy, fun and connection for many. But it can also be a time that is stressful or triggering. Become aware of potential triggers that may come up for you and ensure you have tools to cope with them. Set yourself a clear management plan and visualise yourself coping ahead of the time.

Common triggers might be:

- The grief and loss associated with not having a loved one at holidays
- Food and body related fears and concerns
- Financial pressure and strain
- Difficult family dynamics
- Increased social anxiety

Some suggested coping strategies may be:

- Plan ahead
- Know your limits and boundaries
- Have time on your own away from the stressors if possible
- Engage in self-care
- Reach out for support



TIP TWO

Manage conflict with skill!

For some family gatherings can be a cause of stress or discomfort. You may be trying to manage difficult dynamics or sensitive topics that make you feel uncomfortable such as discussions about diets, politics or vaccinations!

Also bear in mind, most of us likely coming into the holiday season fatigued, burn-out and overwhelmed by the pressures of the year. All of this in combination making conflict more likely to occur. However, you can try this communication tool to manage conflict effectively and ensure healthy dialogue.

Remember the acronym DEAR MAN as the template for communication (from the Dialectical Behavioural Therapy Model).

DESCRIBE

Clearly and concisely describe the facts of the situation, without any judgment.

EXPRESS

Use "I" statements to express your emotions.

ASSERT

Clearly state what you want or need. Be specific when giving instructions or making requests.

REINFORCE

Reward people who respond well, and reinforce why your desired outcome is positive.

This can be as simple as a smile and a "thank you".

MINDFULNESS

Be mindful of your objective of the interaction. Do not get sidetracked or distracted by other issues.

APPEAR CONFIDENT

Use body language to show confidence, even if you don't feel it. Stand up straight, make appropriate eye contact, speak clearly, and avoid fidgeting.

NEGOTIATE

Know the limits of what you are willing to accept, but be willing to compromise within them.



TIP THREE

Maintain your routine and foundational lifestyle factors.

It's called "silly season" for a reason, and the drastic increase in social activities, increased alcohol usage, disrupted routines and likely less sleep will all take its toll on your mental health.

Try your best to maintain some of the following things to ensure you are looking after your mental health:

- Ensure you are sleeping 8 hours a night, trying to wake and sleep at similar times each day.
- Maintain 3 meals and 3 snacks a day. Don't let eating out more regularly over the holidays tempt you into skipping meals.
- Have some pleasurable movement in there, with swimming and walking on the beach.
- Manage your alcohol usage, keep in mind this will make you vulnerable to emotion mind taking over and will make it much more difficult to manage the increased stressors.
- Create time at the beginning or end of the day to press pause, be mindful and slow down. Incorporate 5 minutes of mindfulness or journaling. You have the time!



TIP FOUR

Make it a meaningful and fulfilling holiday period by connecting with your values.

Use values to guide your choices and behaviours through the busy holiday period. Your mind will likely try make your focus be on unhelpful things, such as on our body when we are trying to be at the beach, food-rules when we are eating something delicious or that we are unlikeable when we are trying to have a good time.

So try manage and separate from those unhelpful thoughts, and refocus toward what truly matters and what you actually want to remember your holiday to be about.

Some examples could be:

- Adventure: plan an outing that is different from your usual activities or a trip you have been meaning to do. Such as travel to a new destination or try sky diving.
- Connection: build in time with those you care about, reach out to a friend you haven't seen for a while or make the focus family this holiday.
- Kindness and Love: demonstrate acts of care for others, e.g. write someone a card about what they mean to you or send a gift to someone who wouldn't expect one.
- Achievement: tick something off your list or try a new skill or hobby with your time off.
- Contribution: donate items or your time to help someone in need. Volunteer at a shelter or donate to charity.
- Fun: create opportunities to have fun, whether it's playing a card game with friends, going to a movie or a music gig.
- Relaxation: read that book, connect with nature, have a mindful tea or bake something.



TIP FIVE

Form new habits in 2022.

Focus on setting yourself up with new habits moving into the new year and implement the following '7 Rs' for Lasting Change by Russ Harris.

These steps can help us sustain new patterns of behaviour, until we've done them for so long they become habitual.

1. Reminders – use simple tools to help remind you of your new behaviour you wish to persist with, such as phone alarms or sticky notes.
2. Records – note when and where you want to do the new behaviour and what the benefits are. Also when and where we do the old behavior, and what the costs are.
3. Rewards – part of records through noticing the benefits of the behaviour; can also include material rewards.
4. Routines – build a regular routine or ritual around your new behaviour so it becomes habitual.
5. Relationships – have a person to commit to the new behaviour with, they can either join you or help keep you on track with your records or reminders.
6. Reflecting – regularly take the time to reflect on how you are behaving and what effect it is having on your life. Also reflect on the times that you stop doing the new behaviour, and fall back into the old one. Review the triggers.
7. Restructuring – restructure your environment to make our new behaviour easier.



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We hope you found this a useful resource.

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