

Finding peace during the holidays

The holidays tend to bring shopping, parties, presents and... extra doses of stress. When the busyness of the season is at its peak, it can be hard to stop and regroup.

Use the suggestions below to stay centered, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or the same year after year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones.

Stick to a budget. Decide how much money you can afford to spend this year, then stick to your budget. Overextending yourself financially can be a source of stress long after the holidays are over.

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you don't have the time or desire can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Choose some indulgences this year – an occasional late night, skipped workout or big festive meal is part of the holiday fun. Otherwise, stick to your sleep, exercise and eating routines as much as you can to help maintain your mental and physical health.

Set aside differences. Family support is important, even in the face of challenges and issues. Keep conversation light, making sure to avoid topics that are known to cause family tension. Prepare and practice what you might say if a conversation begins to get heated, such as “let's move on for now.” Stop before speaking and take time to respond.

Acknowledge your feelings. If you can't be with family and friends this year or have experienced the loss of a loved one, it's normal to feel sadness and grief. Opting out of some seasonal hustle and bustle may be important for your emotional wellbeing. Take time to express your feelings with someone you trust. Writing in a journal can also be a good outlet.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, connecting with others can help. Say hello to neighbors, write holiday cards or pick up the phone and call an old friend you haven't spoken to in a while. You are far from the only person feeling down this holiday season and it may be surprising how eager others are to connect if you give them a chance.

Seek professional support if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad, anxious or irritable, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep or face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, reach out to a mental health professional or contact your employee or member assistance program.

The holiday toolkit

