

Dealing with stress

We are entering a period of the year that can be a time of fun, memories, and great joy. However, it can also be a very difficult and stressful time for many. The demands of school are kicking into high gear, while trying to balance extracurricular activities. Holidays are approaching. Summer is giving way to fall and fall to winter. There are many that get very excited about this time of year and look forward to all the activities and family time. There are also many who struggle during this time of year and feel overwhelmed, sad, disappointed, nostalgic, and stressed. And then there are many who experience all of these feelings during this time.

Here are some tips to help during stressful times and when you are just feeling stressed:

1. **Have good, but flexible and realistic expectations.**

It's wonderful to shoot for straight As, being the star in your extracurricular activity, getting the perfect presents for family and friends, making the best holiday meal ever, putting up the perfect decorations, making everyone happy at all times, smiling and being joyful at all times, never letting anyone see you sweat, etc. However, life happens, and it is very difficult to be perfect and have everything align at all times. That doesn't mean that it's not worth trying to do your best or have the best experience, it just means to allow for things to happen that might be a little less than you were wanting or a lot less than you were wanting and not let it rob you of the joy of the day or days you are living and/or celebrating. Sometimes, those unexpected, not so great things that come up can make even more memorable and exciting experiences. Embrace the imperfections and enjoy the moment and those you are sharing it with. And if you are struggling because you aren't sharing it with anyone, embrace the moment of solitude and peace and do something that puts a smile on your face, which may include volunteering around others to help put a smile on their faces.

2. **People always matter more than things.**

We always struggle with comparing ourselves with others, especially in regard to possessions (e.g., house, car, clothes, phones, electronics, money, etc.). This time of year can be even more difficult in this area, especially worrying about what we can provide for our children and how it will compare to their friends and peers. A lot of families put themselves in really bad positions by trying to make up for the "lack" that they see and feel through the year and spending way more than they can afford to make the "season" special for their family members. In the end, what people want most is to feel loved, cared about, and appreciated. This can be done in ways that result in little or no financial expense. This is also a great time for all families to look for others less fortunate than themselves and find a way to give to others. Again, there are many ways to do so that result in little or no financial expense. Also, many struggles in this area occur because conflict occurs between family members and/or friends who have different personalities and beliefs about things. Remember to focus on what is truly important and accept people for who they are and work on keeping conflict out of interactions. Mutual respect goes a long way.

3. **Keep it simple, but meaningful and do what works for you.**

If going all out and spending countless hours preparing, decorating, baking, shopping, etc. works for you and truly brings peace and contentment, then enjoy the experience and the memories you make. However, if you get stressed out trying to keep up the pace and/or expectations, then give yourself permission to scale a back and do what is comfortable and doable for you and your family. And, if you have always been able to pull off the extravagant experience, but are now dealing with some things in life you weren't dealing with before, then give yourself permission to scale things back to what now works for you and your family. Many families I know have very simple, slow paced traditions that have brought great joy for generations. Again, allow yourself to enjoy what is doable and works for you and your family.

4. **Listen to your body, mind, and spirit.**

Listen to your body, mind, and spirit. If they are telling you that you are struggling to keep up and stress is building too much, then stop, assess, and adapt as needed. Maybe you just need a little break to revive. Maybe you need to adjust the plan a little bit to alleviate the stress. Maybe you need to totally redo the plan and accept a new plan that alleviates the stress. Listen to your body's messages and respond accordingly.

5. **Ask for help.**

That's pretty much it. If needed, ask for help. You may be surprised how many family and friends are willing and want to help.

Here are some links that might be helpful as well:

[Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping - Mayo Clinic](#)

[Understanding and Managing Holiday Stress \(verywellmind.com\)](#)

[Holiday Stress: 8 Ways to Cope With Stress During the Holidays - Ingredia Inc. \(ingredia-usa.com\)](#)

[Dealing With Holiday Depression and Stress – Cleveland Clinic](#)

[Holiday stress resource center \(apa.org\)](#)



