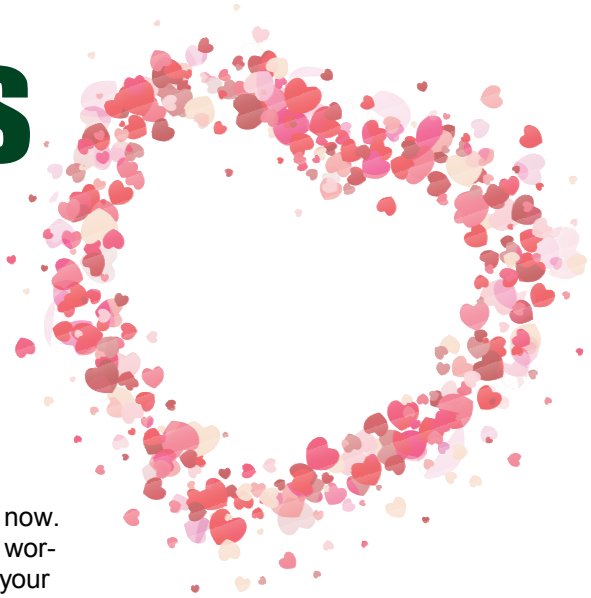
# Managing Stress

## For Holiday Family Get-togethers



Holiday family get-togethers can be stressful. All of those old childhood wounds can get re-opened, and, in some families, new issues are created. Even in families that appear to get along, unvoiced resentments from the past can linger behind a mask of normalcy.

You can relax and enjoy your family this holiday season with a few simple tips.

### Prepare a "Self-care" Plan

Decide how long you want to interact with difficult family members and determine your boundaries. One boundary might be for you to stay at a hotel instead of in your family member's home so that you can have some downtime. Another might be for you to determine what topics you want to avoid.

### Practice Answers to Triggers

You can bet that topics you hope won't come up, in fact, will. If your cousin is still angry that you inherited your grandmother's antique pitcher, think ahead about how you will handle it. One way is to "redirect," which is simply the strategy of changing the topic of conversation. You can also tell your cousin you don't wish to discuss the issue at this time and then change the subject.

### Let Go of Resentments

Decide what grievances you'll let go of for the day. Sometimes, being around family requires us to forget about past issues and simply enjoy everyone despite them. It may be worth it to not avoid your brother-in-law, whom you don't like, if you don't get much time during the year to enjoy your little nieces and nephews.

Save the big issues for another time. If you need to confront your Aunt Suzy about something that hurt you, address it after the holiday get-together. Remember the holidays are supposed to be about love and peace. You can put the war off for another day.

### Practice Mindfulness

The reality is, we only have right now. Not dwelling on the past and not worrying about the future can make your holiday celebrations a success. It can also make you a happier person in general. Focus on your needs and what is happening at this very moment and enjoy it.

### Have a Lifeline

Make plans ahead of time to connect with a friend during the festivities to support each other. Hearing a friendly voice can help you sort out your feelings when you are "triggered." And processing stress with a friend usually leads to a few therapeutic laughs.

### You're Not the Only One

Remember, others are hurting too. You aren't the only one feeling stress or getting triggered. It's a part of many families' dynamics. Be thoughtful if another family member gets upset or doesn't live up to your expectations. Keep perspective. You just might find a little humor in some of the less serious gripes that seem to linger over the years.

### Set Your Sites on What You Enjoy

Have something to look forward to. After your family celebration, schedule a get-together with friends or part of the family that brings you joy. Knowing that this event is coming up can give you that extra bump to get through time with some of the more difficult personalities.

Family get-togethers are often a mixed bag of emotions. But learning to enjoy family members for whom they are while setting boundaries can make these celebrations some of your favorite times of the year.

### The Family Political Divide

Despite what some might suggest, getting in family members' faces or using this time to argue politics and policies is not a good idea. Still, with the current political divisiveness in our country, there's bound to be an argument or two during family holiday parties. What can you do to avoid debates or hard feelings?

The easiest answer: Avoid the topic of politics. If you are the host, tell your family that politics will not be a topic of conversation. If it comes up, respectfully remind the family member of the rule.

Most political arguments are about venting, not persuading. Accept political differences as a reality of all democratic forms of government. It's not going away. This can help you keep perspective.

Holiday stress comes in all forms, but preparation and planning can help you appreciate this time of year, avoid isolation, and learn how to take control of your emotions while enjoying what the season offers.



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