



Tips For Managing the Stress of the Holidays

Often times the greatest source of our stress during the holidays comes from the pressure that we put on ourselves through our thought and feelings. This in turn can create stress and anxiety. If we learn how to adjust our expectations, we can help reduce our stress. What are some thoughts we have that can cause stress?

- ❖ Worrying about situations out of our control.
- ❖ Trying to make everything perfect.
- ❖ Having high expectations of ourselves. Putting more on your to do list than you can handle.
- ❖ Eating too much food or unhealthy food choices, drinking too much alcohol.
- ❖ Family conflict
- ❖ Loneliness and/or depression and/or grief
- ❖ Financial stressors- not setting a budget, overspending
- ❖ Traveling during the holidays with the added traffic

Flawed thinking is another way to contribute to your stress. There are 3 areas that I think are most common.

- ❖ The Shoulds, this is where we put unrealistic demands on ourselves and/or others. Like I really should get presents for everyone. I really should keep up with all the family traditions no matter what.
- ❖ Catastrophizing where you focus on the worst possible scenario in a situation. It would be horrible if something went wrong over the holidays. It would be terrible if I couldn't buy nice gifts for my friends and family.
- ❖ All or Nothing Thinking If I don't decorate for the holidays, I will ruin it for everyone. Thinking about the loved ones that are not here with us will just make holidays depressing.

Question the Shoulds that you place on yourself or that others place on you. Avoid Catastrophizing when things don't go well. Is it really the end of the world if this year's holidays weren't the greatest? And catch your All or Nothing Thinking and look for some middle ground. This may help reduce your stress.

So, how can you cope? First of all, remember, you can't control what other people say, do or act but you can control what you think, say and feel. You are the keeper of your emotions. You can choose to look at a situation differently and your emotions will follow. For example, you can say how sad you are that your loved one is not here to celebrate this time with you and this can leave you feeling blue. Or, you could say let's go make that cookie recipe that our loved one made every year for us and it can put you in a happier mood remembering the good memories. The choice is up to you.

It is important to find time to relax. Some ideas you can try include, deep breathing (inhale to the count of 8, hold for the count of 8 and exhale to the count of 8) do this until you start to feel relaxed. Stretching, yoga, meditation or take a walk. Dance and sing to holiday tunes or watch your favorite holiday movie. Talk to a friend, pastor, counselor or even journal when you are feeling stressed. Maybe do something for someone else. Feel gratitude for what you do have or just do something you love, just for you.

Get out into the sunshine when you can, the fresh air and the sunshine are great mood boosters.

Lastly, remember that maybe some of these holiday traditions are not something that you enjoy. That's ok. You can choose what works best for you or maybe even come up with some new traditions that have meaning for you. If you have any questions or want to talk with someone, please feel free to contact me. Cyndie Gilliam, LMFT, TANF Therapist at (619)460-3400 ext. 210 or cgilliam@sctca.net. Happy Holidays to you and yours!

