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## Must-Know Words

**Stress** is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives.

**Self-compassion** is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering.



## Coping Skill Corner

### Get Moving!



The words "exercise" or "work out" can be overwhelming to some. What if you use the word "movement" instead?

Getting in a healthy amount of movement (which can include skating, cleaning, walking, dancing, and more!) can help you in a variety of ways to:

- Release stress
- Expend extra energy
- Boost energy when you're sluggish
- Improve sleep
- Calm the nervous system
- Increase self-esteem

Check out this helpful video which features [Five Big Body Coping Skills](#).



Note: This newsletter includes links to external resources.

## Stress & The Holidays

### What stressors do you have around the holidays?

- Working
  - Decorating
  - Cooking
  - Baking
  - Hosting
  - Traveling
  - Family Shopping
  - Gift Giving
  - Illnesses
  - Money
- KIDS HOME FOR WINTER BREAK!**



According to a recent poll, **parents reported that:**

- the **holidays are generally a happy time** (96%),
- their **stress levels are high** during the holiday season (23% of mothers and 12% of fathers),
- their **child has unrealistic holiday expectations** (20%),
- they have **unrealistic expectations of themselves** (28%), and
- 20% of parents acknowledge that **their own stress level negatively affects their child's enjoyment of the holidays.**

Parents who rate their holiday stress level as high are more likely to report a negative impact for their child, compared to those who rate their holiday stress level as medium or low.

**There are ways to manage all of this holiday stress!**

Source: 'Tis the season to be...stressed? (2021, December 20). National Poll on Children's Health. <https://mottpoll.org/reports/tis-season-stressed>



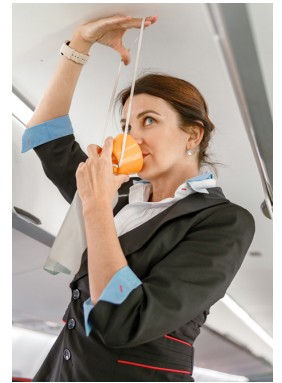
## Ways For Parents To Prevent Holiday Stress Before It Starts

- **Be realistic**
  - Think about what is actually achievable for you and your kids. Try to respect what is going to set you all up for the most success and not overextend anything or anyone and plan accordingly.
- **Set and enforce expectations**
  - Advise your kids of the plans for holiday break and what you expect. Discuss routines, plans, limitations, social expectations, expected behaviors, etc.
- **Keep it structured**
  - Kids tend to thrive more on structure and routine. Keep their usual sleep/wake, eating, and activity routines consistent across winter break as much as possible.
- **Set limits**
  - Limit screen time and sugar intake. Plan for healthier alternatives.
- **Don't over-schedule**
  - Manage the schedule and try not to over-book. Consider how traveling or other scheduled activities may affect you and your kids. See if there is a way to plan in breaks to proactively reduce stress.
- **Get active and go outside**
  - Ensure kids have opportunities to be active and expend their physical energy. Give them time outside for some fresh air and nature therapy.
- **Plan enjoyable activities**
  - If you are able to add in some fun (and not over-book yourselves), plan some enjoyable family or friend activities
- **Be kind**
  - Intentionally practice gratitude and kindness as a family ([see November's Mental Health Matters Newsletter for ideas](#)).
- **Relax**
  - Ensure that there is enough peaceful, quiet, down-time to recover from travel, social activities, and more.
  - Plan in de-stressing downtime activities as a parent. Ensure you manage your stress levels well so you can help your kids!



## Coping with the Holidays

- **Feel the Feels** - It's normal to have a wide range of feelings. Allow yourself to recognize them and manage them.
- **Self-care** - Remember the airplane safety messages? You have to put on your oxygen mask before others. Why? You cannot care for others if you're not functional. There are tons of ways to cope with stress and take care of yourself!
- **Prioritize & Compromise** - We're only human. Prioritize what's most important, compromise, and let go of the rest.
- **Say "no"** - While it's not always easy, practicing saying "no" helps us to respect our boundaries and limits.
- **Embrace dualities** - We can have two, seemingly competing, feelings and thoughts at the same time. Watch this video to learn how to allow them both to co-exist as they are both true.
- **Let it out** - Find someone to vent to or write in a journal.
- **Talk to yourself nicely** - We have inner self-talk and we're not always nice to ourselves. Recognize your self-talk and, if it's unhelpful, replace it with helpful self-talk, such as "This too will pass." "I've gotten through hard things before; I can do this." "We'll figure this out." "I can do this."
- **Forgive** - We may lose our cool. Recognize it, use coping skills, forgive yourself, apologize, and move forward.
- **Breathe** - There are several breathing techniques and they're not one-size-fits-all. Try different ones and see what technique gives you the most relief.
- **Laugh** - Find things you enjoy and can laugh at. Laughter helps in many ways!



## Grief During the Holidays

Feelings of grief often ebb and flow in an ongoing process; however, grief can increase around special dates, such as birthday, and the holidays. Check out this wonderful article ***How to support grieving children over the holidays: 5 tips from a child psychologist.***





## Healthy Relationships with (Holiday) Food

As individuals, we may have different thoughts and feelings about food. Our perceptions about food are often informed through personal experiences, messages (and criticisms) we've received from others about food, our culture, society, physicians, diet culture, our own self-concept, and more. The holidays often exacerbate our thoughts and feelings about food, and we might express any unhelpful views about food through our words and actions. We may restrict what we eat or how much is eaten, overindulge, or say things to ourselves or others like, "Are you sure you want to eat that?" "You don't need seconds." or "That food is going to make you fat." Instead, **try these tips:**

- **Role model healthy relationships with food. Show your children the following:**
- **Remember that food is fuel.** We all need a healthy amount and variety of food to fuel our bodies. There are no hard-and-fast rules of "good foods" or "bad foods."
- **Consider the big picture.** We often eat some healthy foods during the holidays and indulge our "sweet" or "savory tooth." Things often balance things out in the long-run.
- **It's ok to set boundaries or say no!** You can plan to have only one slice of pie, say no to seconds, or set limits you determine to be reasonable and healthy for your body.
- **Listen to your body's cues.** We've probably all eaten so much we've felt sick before. Your stomach takes about 20 minutes to tell your brain that it's full. Take your time eating and try mindful eating. When considering going back for more, you may want to say to yourself or to hosts, "not right now, but maybe later" so you can re-evaluate if you're still hungry after some time.
- **Practice (self-)compassion.** When it comes down to it, overindulgence can happen. Be kind to yourself and others and recognize that the holidays only come once a year. Some of our favorite foods may only be made or served during this time, so we may need to give ourselves and others a little grace.
- **Switch your mindset.** Instead of punishing ourselves, such as "I have to exercise extra tomorrow to work off this piece of pie," think a more helpful thought like, "I enjoyed a tasty meal today and I'll have a great workout tomorrow."
- **Use healthy self-talk internally and externally.** Practice kindness to yourself and others. What we say to ourselves and others matters and it can have a significant impact. Make sure to leave a positive effect.



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