

# Celebrating Holidays the Mental Health Way

**Presents, decorations, celebrations and family, OH MY! The holiday season can quickly become overwhelming and stressful. This holiday season challenge yourself to celebrate in a new way. Instead of taking on more and more, decide to take on less. Prioritize. Focus on the important stuff and let go of the rest. Sounds simple enough, right? But how?**

First spend time articulating what is really important to you. Is it family? Religious traditions? Generosity? Packing as much activity as you can into a few short days? (Ok, probably not that one, but that's what many of us end up doing!) Really think about this. When January 2<sup>nd</sup> rolls around, what do you want to be able to say about how you spent your holidays?

Next, take a look at all the activities you do in any given holiday season. Then decide which ones actually help you meet your holiday goals, and which ones take away from them. For example, if every year you cook a huge holiday spread you may find yourself spending more time with the food in the kitchen than enjoying time with your loved ones. Maybe it's time for that tradition to go. Instead you might ask others to bring a dish to pass, decide to order pizza, or

just go to a restaurant. If you do decide to host a large meal, use disposable plates and utensils to shorten clean-up and free-up time to spend with the family. There are many ways to tweak holiday traditions to make them work for you instead of against you. Be creative!

Finally, pay attention to yourself. Maybe you're prone to Seasonal Affective Disorder (depression that usually appears in the fall or winter), maybe you're grieving, or maybe you have some other situations or mental health concerns that add even more stress to your holiday season. The good news is that people have an amazing knack to know what they need and how to take care of themselves at any given moment. The problem is that many of us don't listen to ourselves. If you find yourself getting cranky, having trouble sleeping, worrying more than you usually do, or are just plain unhappy most of the time, take a few minutes and ask yourself, "What do I need?" usually the answer is simple—sleep, rest, a hug, a break, time out with friends, a walk—whatever it is, do it for yourself! Small efforts can go a long way in helping yourself enjoy your holiday season, so choose one thing that you commit to doing for yourself today!

If you find yourself struggling with stress, depression, sadness, anxiety, grief, or any other problem this holiday season, call EAP for free and confidential help. Ascension WI EAP's team of professional counselors is here for you—you never have to struggle alone.

~ HAPPY HOLIDAYS ~