

Stress and the Holidays



The holidays can be a wonderful time to get together with friends and family to celebrate and create memories. This year of 2020 will be like no other and it will be challenging to adjust to what is doable, safe and wise. As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise, many people are shunning their holiday traditions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, but are now experiencing a different type of stress, replacing the hustle and bustle of having too much to do during the holiday season with uncertainty, isolation and the loss of routine and tradition.

We can easily get caught up in the stress of the holidays and fail to see how Christ is at the center of it all. In the information below, we address 1) the Holiday Stress that is unique for 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, and 2) Holiday Stress that can result from our own and others' expectations, core beliefs and traditions when they are unexamined.

As you read through the recommendations below, ask God to gently nudge your heart toward paying attention to and following which ones would be best for you and your loved ones.

Christmas 2020 & Covid-19

(from article by Kim Eisenberg, LCSW, <https://www.sharp.com/health-news/kim-eisenberg.cfm>. Added comments and faith application by Linda Carlos, LMFT)

It is understandable that this can be a fearful, lonely and trying time for many. However, the best thing we can do is NOT resist the reality of the situation; instead, embrace it. Focus on accepting it, even if it is painful and disappointing. Denying this only creates more conflict within. Accepting what is reality and inviting Christ into our situation will bring us comfort and peace. Then we can start to look at the ways we can find meaning, purpose, joy and connection. The acceptance of a disappointing reality and having a meaningful and fulfilling life experience are not mutually exclusive.

Start to think about what might actually be tangible and realistic ways to have meaningful experiences this year, even though they're likely going to be completely different from anything previously experienced. Whether that's scheduling a Zoom family call or volunteering, it's about working within the constraints of the situation.

We are lifted up and out of our own pain and suffering when we do things that are helpful to others. So, even if you're physically isolated, that might look like volunteering to teach a class or host a group online. Look for ways to reach out to others and support causes and communities that you care about to provide some offset to the loneliness and isolation. An added tip for in person and online gatherings: send out a couple of ice breaker questions and guidelines. Focus on the topics that unite your group and keep the conversations warm and friendly, make ALL feel included and welcomed, and call on the quieter ones to insure that everyone gets to share, even if you have to interrupt the talkers! Suggest a specified amount of time for guests to be off unnecessary devices and tuned into one another for maximum joy and connection.

Setting guidelines for gatherings with compassion

If your family is considering in-person holiday celebrations, it is important to recognize there are different ways people are managing pandemic life. And the more you can keep that in mind and approach family members from a place of empathy and compassion, the better you all will be.

“We are all in the same storm,” Eisenberg says. “So, we're weathering the COVID storm together, but in different vessels — we come from different perspectives, core beliefs, values, and ways of processing and synthesizing information.”



Eisenberg offers the following tips:

- Don't assume that everyone's going to be on the same page in terms of behaving the same way and adhering to the same norms.
- Talk explicitly about it ahead of time and come to some consensus around shared expectations of behavior.
- Be in touch with your own values — identify the areas in which you have some flexibility and the things that you're not going to compromise on in order to stay true to yourself.
- Empathize with your loved ones who have differing perspectives, and try to see the underlying values and emotions that are driving their decisions.
- Remember that consensus doesn't mean that you agree 100% about everything. It means that you are able to reach an agreement that everyone can live with moving forward.

Understanding the risks and following precautions

However, it's important to note the CDC warns that in-person gatherings pose varying levels of risk based on the location and duration of the gathering, number of people in attendance, behaviors of attendees, and other important factors. In general, the more people from different households at a gathering, the closer the physical interactions are, and the longer the interactions last, the greater the risk that someone who has COVID-19 — with or without symptoms — may spread it to others.

CDC Guidelines Link

If your family does decide to celebrate together, the agency offers several [tips for hosting and attending holiday gatherings](#).

The CDC also notes that people who are at high-risk of severe COVID-19 or flu illness, such as older adults or those with medical conditions, should not attend any in-person holiday celebrations. The same advice also applies to people who live with or spend time with high-risk individuals and people who feel sick; have been diagnosed with or are showing symptoms of COVID-19; or have recently been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

Making future plans can make everyone feel better

While coping with the disappointment about this year's holiday season can be a challenge, Eisenberg says that looking forward to next year might help. While no one can guarantee what the future holds, [medical experts such as Dr. Anthony Fauci](#) share that proven COVID-19 treatments, successful public health measures and a positive outlook for a potential vaccine should provide some hope.



“While we need to accept the reality that the world is never going to go back to exactly how it was for us pre-pandemic, it is going to continue to get better and we’re going to continue to adapt and be resilient together,” Eisenberg says. “We can allow ourselves to feel hope about the future, look forward to more relaxed times, and start to plan for future holidays, trips, and the tangible milestones and goalposts we want to reach.”

Making the Holidays A Gift You'll Want To Open

There are Five Top Concerns at Holiday Time that People Experience:

- Spending Money
- Choosing who they will spend time with
- Missing special family members and friends
- Not enough time to get everything done
- Getting along with the people or situations we don't like

Which ones are your concerns this year? Circle them and design steps to address them.

Tools to Make the Most of the Holidays:

1. Redefine what “enough” is. It's what we have now, not more than we have now.
2. Tune out all ads and commercials. Their aim is to sell you what you don't necessarily need.
3. Consider the less fortunate. Often, we are unhappy because we forget all we DO have.
4. Forget about “sparkle season” and get back to the basics - family, faith, and friends.
5. Try to free up others. When we expect too much of others, we suffocate them.
6. Love unconditionally. Have age appropriate expectations delivered with unconditional love.
7. Try to not serve it all on a silver platter. Avoid raising a child's materialistic appetites and expectations.
8. Free yourselves of the opinion of others. The esteem of the world is not worth the effort.
9. Take your time. Persistence, the tortoise taught the hare, is more important than speed. Set an earlier ETA. You will enjoy the journey, have planned for the delays, and be on time.
10. Commit yourself to a budget.
11. Develop an accountability network. Lifestyle changes can become successful with accountability.
12. Examine your motives for spending, your reasons for choices of gifts.
13. Practice a Sabbath rest. Unplug one day to rest from busyness and reflect on your blessings.
14. Seek solitude. It builds rest. It is necessary for deeper relationship with God and yourself.
15. Own your decisions.
16. Understand yourself and what expectations you have by writing down what it is you look forward to this season.
17. Avoid unhelpful social comparisons. Comparing ourselves with other people can have a big effect on how we feel.



18. Imagine possible disappointments. Think of how you might handle the disappointments and still communicate your needs and be flexible.
19. Think of ways to remind yourself of the "bigger picture".
20. Have a discussion in advance with those you will be celebrating with about what is important to you and how you can all make the best of your time together.

Select a few of the suggestions above to follow and give yourself the gift of less stress this year!

Relaxing Christmas Music Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvPophhrVMQ>

<https://soundcloud.com/oleksandr-klymkovych/christmas-music-relaxing-christmas-jazz-smooth-christmas-songs-instrumental>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYg70N2vSkq>

<https://soothingrelaxation.com/pages/royalty-free-christmas-music-from-soothing-relaxation>

Sources: <https://www.sharp.com/health-news/kim-eisenberg.cfm>

The Overload Syndrome – Learning To Live Within Your Limits,

Dr. Richard Swenson, NavPress, 1998

Restoring Margin To Overloaded Lives, Dr. Richard Swenson, NavPress, 1999

Handling The Holidays, Dr. Gary Collins, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975

“15 Ways To Beat Holiday Stress”, Beverly Pando, Sacramento Sierra Parent, November, 2004

Additional Resources:

<https://psychcentral.com/holidays/>

<https://www.ssparent.com>

<https://www.OrganizedChristmas.com>

Simplify Your Christmas, Elaine St. James

Celebrate Simply: Your Guide to Simpler, More Meaningful Holidays..., Nancy Twigg

Unplug the Christmas Machine..., Jo Robinson and Jean C. Staeheli