

Emotionally Surviving COVID-19:

An informational and self help guide provided by your Lighthouse Telehealth EAP team.

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Greetings!

For many of us we are already feeling the added stress and/or a sense of grief that the holiday season can bring into our lives. There has been so much tension, disruption, and loss already in 2020 that ironically it may have better prepared some for this holiday season. However, for many it brings about added worries, such as how to celebrate in a pandemic or not being able to visit with loved ones in-person. There is no mistaking that this year will be different than previous years but just because it is different doesn't mean it has to be bad. Try and remember what is most important this season and find creative ways to



celebrate and make new traditions. Ideas might include "unplugging" for a couple days for family activities like a holiday cookie contest, hand-writing notes to loved ones, taking part in a shop-on-line secret Santa with family/friends, or organizing a Zoom game or karaoke night. Often when we reflect on special occasions in our lives, it was the smaller moments or gestures that were most impactful. Also, please remember that if you are struggling with difficult emotions this season you are not alone. You can share difficult feelings with trusted family members, friends, and/or a counselor or therapist.

What to do With Difficult Emotions?

We all experience difficult emotions at times, such as sadness, anger, and fear. In fact, these emotions serve an important role. How would we know happiness without sadness? For this reason, these emotions are sometimes referred to as comparative emotions. Difficult emotions also let us know something is off with our mind or body and signal us to take action. We often try and numb these difficult emotions or run from them (i.e. forcing happiness or distraction) but it is okay to acknowledge these feelings and understand that these emotions are, at times, unavoidable. Labeling the correct emotion can help you accept it for what it is and therefore better accept yourself and take action. For instance, if you are feeling lonely you could either ignore this feeling by staying busy and investing your energy into a project or say to yourself, "I am feeling sad and lonely today. I think I will call a friend and see if he wants to go to dinner." Talking to others about your feelings or journaling can often help you make sense of and deal with these emotions in a healthy manner. It can also be helpful to make a list of things to do when feeling down such as take a walk, call a friend, listen to uplifting music, watch a funny movie, etc. Remember we would not know a good day without the

occasional bad day. Ignoring these difficult emotions, or thoughts leading to the emotion, often in turn creates more anxiety about the emotion itself. Have you ever attempted the mental exercise of trying to ignore thinking about a pink elephant for 1 minute? Very few are unable to keep this image out of their minds for a full minute once they are specifically told not to think about it. This is referred to as ironic process theory-where deliberate attempts to suppress something like a thought actually makes it more likely to surface. "Bad days" can help us learn about ourselves and often lend themselves to personal growth. With that being said, sometimes it isn't always easy to know if you are experiencing difficult emotions too often or too intensely. If difficult emotions are creating problems in your life, such as relationship or work issues, if they persist for days at a times, or are increasing in intensity or frequency, those would be indications to speak to a professional such as a therapist, physician, or EAP counselor.



**"We can never make peace
in the outer world until we
make peace with ourselves."**

– DALAI LAMA

"Sometimes you will never
know the value of a moment
until it becomes a memory.
"

– DR. SEUSS

" I never worry
about the problem.
I worry about the solution.

– SHAQUILLE O'NEAL **"**

**"Worrying doesn't take away
tomorrow's troubles,
it takes away
today's peace."**

– LESSONS LEARNED IN LIFE



Considering an In-person Holiday Gathering?

Many are wondering should I host or attend that holiday gathering this year? That is a tough decision that requires careful consideration of many things including: the general physical health of invitees; if your home is large enough to host the size of your gathering while maintaining appropriate distance; and the emotional strain of not being able to see loved ones in person. The Minnesota Department of Health gives the following suggestions should you decide to host or attend in-person gatherings:



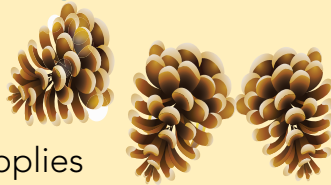
Tips for planning Safe Holiday Celebrations during COVID-19

1. Consider the current level of COVID-19 infection in your community to decide if you should postpone, cancel, or limit the number of guests.
2. Stay home if you do not feel well or are at higher risk of infection from COVID-19.
3. Keep indoor gatherings to 10 people or fewer and outdoor gatherings to 25 people or fewer.
4. Wear masks and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other guests.
5. Open windows and/or doors to allow fresh air to flow. Or, if you live somewhere that is warm enough, host an outdoor gathering.
6. Encourage guests to bring their own food, drinks, and treats.

Source: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/holidays.html#thanksgiving>

Holiday Craft Activity Adventure:

Go on a hike and hunt for a variety of pinecones. Use paint, felt, and other craft supplies to get creative. Examples of projects include: holiday ornaments; a festive turkey, hedgehog, owl, or other animal figure; a wreath; table decoration; or an ornamental tree. A simple internet search will provide hundreds of fun, easy activities for all ages.



Homework:

Holiday Psychological First Aid Kit

You know there will be stress this holiday season so be proactive and prepare for it by creating a holiday first aid tool kit. List 10 or more things you could do that would be helpful should your stress start to get the best of you. These could be things you have used before to calm or distract yourself or things you have never tried but think they might work for you. Make sure you include a variety of tools that you can access quickly should you need that pause from the immediate stressor. Sometimes it just takes a few minutes to calm down and re-focus your thoughts before re-engaging. This can help to prevent your stress from escalating and even avoid creating new stressors.

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Tips for Holiday Mindfulness



The joy and magic of the holiday season is often lost to excessive stress, frustration, and worry. We create an image in our minds of what the holiday should look like, which leads us sometimes to strive for perfection and worry about meaningless details. This year take a moment to evaluate what are the most important aspects of the holiday for you and try to stay focused on those priorities throughout the season.

1. Ask yourself, "Will my loved ones remember how organized the house was or will they value laughter, comfort, and time spent together more?"
2. When you are feeling frazzled, take time out to take a few deep breaths and notice something around you that gives you a sense of gratitude, such as the sun shining through your window, the sound of your child's laughter, or the scent of a freshly lit candle.
3. Take the time to ask yourself, "Does this stressor matter more than the moments it is taking away from me?"
4. Actively engage in the moment. Allow yourself to slow down and savor the moments by joining in on the holiday fun, such as playing a game with your family, scheduling a video call to catch up with your distant relatives, or watching a holiday movie with friends.
5. Practice good self-care to reduce stress. Ideas might include taking a warm hot bath, getting a massage, listening to relaxing music, having a set quiet reading time, following along to a yoga video, or treating yourself to dinner at your favorite restaurant.

Unplugging from electronic devices can help you be successful in enjoying the moments this holiday season!

If your organization would like more information
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