

Mindful Minute

A Mental Health Resource for Parents

VOLUME 10

Building Family Resilience in Stressful Seasons

When a holiday break begins, there are many positives like having more time for fun and relaxation, but the lack of structure and change in normal routines can increase stress on everyone. Families may experience holiday stress related to grief from the loss of a loved one, financial stress, childcare coordination, or other family changes. Practicing the strategies below can build **family resilience**. Resilience is a family's ability to handle stress, bounce back from tough situations, and keep going even when things are hard. These skills help families deal with stress, recover from challenges, and grow stronger through shared experiences.

Provide opportunities to acknowledge and communicate feelings: Take time to talk with each other. Naming thoughts and feelings help each person feel grounded in the here and now. Encouraging children to draw or write stories helps them open up about feelings or fears.

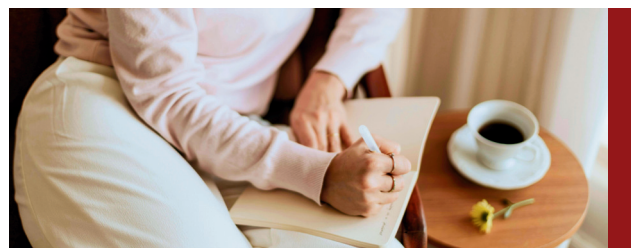


Maintain Stability: Keep routines and rules consistent while allowing for some flexibility to accommodate changes or individual needs.

Focus on the positive: Find opportunities for joy and laughter even during tough times, and remember past successes to build confidence in your collective ability to handle challenges.

Take care of your physical health: Set aside time for your family to do a physical activity together, especially outdoors. Also, eating a balanced diet will help increase resilience in all other areas.

Navigating through the holiday season can be difficult, but it is also a way to find strength and joy in your family experiences.



Self-Care

During the holiday season, parents may prioritize their time, energy, finances, etc., on their children, neglecting their own care and ending the season feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted. There may not be opportunities for lengthy self-care routines, but there are intentional acts of self-love we can do throughout the season to stay grounded.

Know your stress signs: Are you aware of the specific physical, emotional, and behavioral signs that indicate you are reaching your stress limits? Can you identify and name them? Once we name it, we can change it.

Self-care in a snap: When you become overwhelmed with stress, how do you usually react? Can you practice even thirty seconds of using a skill that can help you calm down and reset before you hit your stress limit? Deep breathing can provide relief for us in that present moment. Mindful movement (even if it's just ten minutes) can be especially beneficial to regulate your nervous system (walking, yoga, stretching, dancing, exercise, etc.)

Self-care through boundary setting: Do you tend to overcommit during the holidays? If so, is there a “No” you can establish right now to protect your energy and your time? It may be helpful to establish a clear boundary that protects your peace of mind and eliminates stress.

Grief and loss acknowledgement: For many of us, the holidays can be an especially hard time if we are grieving and/or mourning a loss. How will you set aside time to intentionally honor and sit with these feelings rather than letting them spill over unexpectedly?

Recovery for after the holidays: Right now, can you schedule two acts of self-care that you can do for yourself after the holidays (weekend alone, schedule a massage, night out with friends, etc.)? Having something positive to look forward to at the end of the season may be that little push we need to make it through.

Family Bonding Activities

Board games are a great way to connect as a family. They can build skills such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and communication. Stress is part of the process, so use the opportunity to model how to identify and manage emotions in a healthy way by working together to find what went wrong and trying again. Allow extra time and be intentional with each meltdown or argument.

Navigating loss during this season can feel heavy. **Remembering loved ones** by cooking their favorite meal and discussing your favorite memory with said family member can strengthen connection.

The goal is to focus on activities where mistakes or challenges are likely to occur. When these moments occur, consider asking each other “Do you want me to help you? Hug you? or Hear you?” Identifying the person’s feelings and validating those experiences can lead to important conversations as you navigate the holidays together.



Communication Strategies

Due to traveling, festivities, and family gatherings, your child may experience increased anxiety during the holiday season. It is best to check for signs of withdrawal from your child.

Are they staying in their room while the family is playing holiday games? Have they decreased the time they spend talking to friends? In this scenario, set aside a time to speak with them one-on-one to discuss any stressors. Consider taking a walk, decorating the tree, or even having a lazy day at home, as long as you are together.

Respecting your child's downtime is important for recharging, especially for teens. Sharing your emotions with your child is a great way to establish and model communication. After seeing you model the practice, your child will likely follow your example and begin to share their own emotions. Giving your child the freedom to express what's going on in their personal life can also increase healthy communication. As a tip, try not to mention the return to school. This is your child's time to enjoy family and relaxation. Adding on future responsibilities and tasks may increase worry when not needed.

The holidays often come with high expectations for joy, togetherness, and perfection, but those ideals can create unnecessary stress. Setting realistic expectations helps people focus on what truly matters: connection, meaning, and rest. It is okay if every plan does not go perfectly or every tradition is not fulfilled. Prioritize what brings genuine joy and let go of the pressure to meet unrealistic standards. By giving yourself and others grace, the holidays can become more peaceful and fulfilling.



Helpful Resources

Please scan the QR code to explore a variety of mental health articles and videos.

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