

GETTING THROUGH  
THE HOLIDAYS...  
SOME HELPFUL  
HINTS FROM:



THE ME WE  
FAMILY  
EDUCATION &  
SUPPORT GROUP

"MAKING A DIFFERENCE,  
NOW THAT YOU KNOW"



## *How to Cope with Grief During the Holidays*

*"Life tossed us up into the air, scattered us,  
and we all somehow found our way back.  
And we will do it again. And again." - -*

Alexandra Bracken

Don't you wish you could press pause on the grieving process during the holiday season? I remember wishing I could do just that during the first (and several) holiday season following the painful loss of a loved one in my life. I recall being conflicted as there were times when I wanted to participate in the excitement and joy but simultaneously either didn't want to participate at all or felt guilty for celebrating. That conflict still exists many years later. Grief is complicated and unique for everyone. While accepting loss becomes easier over time, it is often something we carry with us forever.

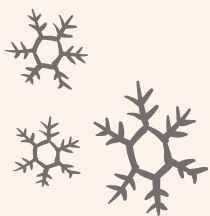
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You are braver than you believe,  
stronger than you seem, and smarter  
than you think.  
-- A.A. Milne

## *Seven Ways to Cope with Holiday Stress*

Looking ahead to holiday gatherings, events and activities may fill you with anticipation and excitement, along with a little angst. You may feel that build-up of anxiety as the holidays approach. According to a [recent APA poll](#), nearly one in three Americans expects to be more stressed this holiday season than last year. On top of the inevitable complexities and tensions of family relationships, you may be feeling the pressures of holiday shopping, gift and travel expenses, the stress of hosting gatherings or managing a packed calendar of holiday events. High, and sometimes unrealistic expectations for the holidays can add to the stress. Loneliness and grief can also be heightened during the holidays. Here are some coping strategies to help you bolster your mental health during the holidays.

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## *Navigating the Holidays When Your Child is in Early Recovery From Addiction*

Families can experience many emotions while navigating the holidays, whether in still waters or rough seas. Friends and families come together and we place at the forefront of our thoughts all of the joy of our connections that we sometimes forget in the day-to-day. In these special times, our gratitude for life and joy in all we share is so sharply focused that many describe these as “magical” times, bursting with wonder and delight.

The flipside to this coin is that emotional pain and difficulties may also be magnified during these times. We miss lost loved ones a little bit more. We remember and wish for simpler times. We feel the weight of difficult circumstances a little bit heavier.

In few ways is this phenomena more realized than with families who have a loved one in very early recovery. Strong emotions combine with a multitude of questions to create a feeling of constant pressure and walking on eggshells. Families want to know how they should act around their loved ones new to recovery. They ask if they should have alcohol at gatherings, who should be invited to functions, even if they should participate in celebrations at all. They wonder if they should give gifts or hold back. They agonize over how to have a “normal” holiday, often having had so many where their loved one was actively using substances – or even absent altogether

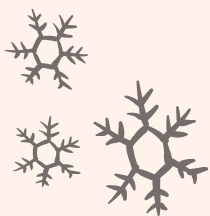
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Every second Sunday in December – on Worldwide Candle Lighting Day – family and friends gather to remember our loved ones who left this world too soon. Worldwide Candle Lighting Day started in the United States in 1997 as a small observance and has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world



*Sunday*  
*12/10/2023*



## *10 Fun Free Sober Activities for the Holidays*

The holiday season can prove to be a challenge for those in recovery. From holiday parties filled with temptations to lack of family or friends to spend time with, many people recovering from substance abuse relapse during these times. Instead of giving into temptations or focusing on hardship, consider these 10 fun free sober activities focused on making someone else's holiday special.

- 1. Donate to Goodwill** - Many people are less fortunate and lack the necessities to stay warm in the cold season. Instead of heading to a party, clean out your closet of all the clothes that no longer fit you. By donating them to Goodwill or another charity, you are helping another person. If you don't have a local charity close by, take the clothes to an area where people in need hang out and distribute them yourself. This act of kindness will warm your heart and theirs.
- 2. Start a Hobby to Help Others** - By knitting, sewing, or crocheting hats and scarfs for others you will not only fill your time, but help people in need. Invite your friends or peer group to take part and make it a weekly event.
- 3. Hold a Movie Night at Local Children's Home** - When you don't have friends to hang out with during the holidays think of others in the same situation. Organize a movie night at the local children's home and have each child come dressed as their favorite movie character. Don't forget your own costume!
- 4. Volunteer at a Soup Kitchen** - When hungry for something to do volunteer at a soup kitchen. Nothing fills the soul like feeding others. Not only do these people need food, they need company. You never know when someone there may also be recovering from substance abuse and need a friend to talk to about the struggle and the joy of sobriety.

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## *Common Myths About Grief*



**Myth: There are 5 stages of grief, and everyone goes through them in order.**

Truth: Most griever's experience sadness, shock, anger, and guilt. However, griever's do not move through those feelings in set stages and in a specific order. There is neither a road map for grief nor an end that everyone reaches.

**Myth: The goal is to "get over" the death of someone you love.**

Truth: Children will always miss the person who died, and that is normal. Grief will change and look different overtime. Tasks of mourning can include accepting the reality of the loss, learning healthy coping skills, and maintaining a connection to the loved one.

**Myth: Staying busy is the best way to help grieving children.**

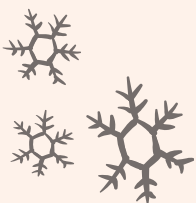
Truth: It is important to make time to grieve. Children are already feeling sad and missing their loved one. Staying busy does not stop those feelings; it only prevents the child from being able to express them.

**Myth: Everyone grieves the same way.**

Truth: Children, adolescents, women and men all grieve differently. Children grieve differently from other children. Some process emotions through play, some through talking, and others process internally making it seem as if they are not grieving. Especially within families, it is important to remember that everyone is grieving, they are just doing it differently from each other.

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## *Family Fun (for all ages)*



Build your own personalized Jeopardy board. Make it about your family, traditions, etc. (takes about an hour, skill level 2)



### Thankful Tree

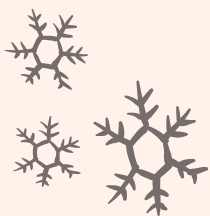
Arrange beautiful fall stems in a container to add a touch of autumn to your home – then use kraft paper, a paper punch and some twine to create leaf tags for guests to complete & hang on the tree.



A scavenger hunt can be put together with minimal effort, or click on the sample above and use the copy provided.



*Put your PJ's on early and watch your favorite holiday movie*



## *Self Care During the Holiday*

-- Breshay Moore, [NHC.org](http://NHC.org)

For some people, the holidays are a happy time. For others, it's an overwhelming time, bringing up a lot of emotions. Financial stress, personal and familial obligations, and balancing work can contribute to the overwhelming dread for some this holiday season. All while others are still facing COVID-19 anxiety for themselves and their loved ones. So this holiday season, the National Health Council (NHC) is sharing some self-care tips to help you have a stress-free holiday.

### **1. Take some time for yourself**

An increase in social activities during the holiday season is common. Your family and friends may expect you to show up to every event. But it's also important to carve out some time for yourself to do some of the things you enjoy. Remember, your personal time is also essential and necessary to recharge.

### **2. Get active**

Physical activity helps support a healthy mind and body. It also gets the blood flowing. So, try to find time to take a walk with a friend, or do a 30-minute exercise routine to get your body moving. It'll help you release some steam too!

### **3. Meditate**

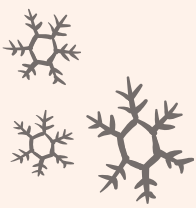
Our minds can race so much throughout the day, with everything and everyone moving so fast. So, to keep your mind at ease, try doing a 5- or 10-minute meditation session. This will help keep your mind on the present moment and help you take a moment to just breathe.

### **4. Rest**

A good night's sleep can help you get ready for the day ahead, especially if it'll be busy with work and family obligations. You may be running around to get last minute gifts for the holidays, but it's also important to make time to rest. It's best to get at least 8 hours of sleep to prepare your mind and body for the day.

**NACG** (*National Alliance for Children's Grief*) HOLIDAY TOOLKIT SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE GRIEVING DURING THE SEASON OF FAMILY  
Click [HERE](#) for complete Toolkit

EVERY  
journey  
NEEDS A  
first  
STEP



## 7 Ways to Make Thanksgiving a Good Family Experience Without Alcohol

The holidays are stressful for many people. Just being around people that you may not get along with and dealing with the ups and downs of making everyone happy is hard to do. When you add addiction recovery to the picture, Thanksgiving can seem like an impossible day. How are you going to hold it all together when your family has traditions that often include substances like alcohol? **Making the Changes That Matter** You cannot force anyone to change their traditions or to alter experiences just for you. You can ask them to, and you can hope they will help. If they choose not to work with you, you can decide to go your own way. When you're working hard for your sobriety, the last thing you want to do is jeopardize it for one day.

This year, instead of focusing on how to avoid that uncle who's always forcing a drink into your hand, create some new ways to celebrate the holiday. Remember how much you have to be thankful for this year. You can celebrate this day with a combination of traditions you love and the support you need. Here are some ideas to manage the stress of the holidays.

**#1: Open Up to Your Loved Ones Early On** Take a few minutes this week to talk to your family members about Thanksgiving, your risks, and what they can do to help. This is a great time to open up the conversation about your recovery and how important it is that you have support. It may be an opportunity for family members to learn how they play a role in your success, too. Don't expect family to recognize what you're really facing on a daily basis; describe your struggles for them.

**#2: Host a Meal for Your Friends with Substance Use Disorders** If you have the ability to do so, host a few people from your drug or alcohol treatment facility or perhaps your local meeting. Bring people together to share, splitting the costs as you do. Offer support to the person you know who will be alone this year, showing them that you're there for their recovery, too. Encourage your family to be a part of the experience, showcasing to them how important it is to provide a helping hand.

**#3: Make It Clear You're Not Serving Alcohol of Any Type** One of the most important steps you'll make this holiday season is to let others know that the event you're hosting will not include alcohol. If you are hosting a dinner on the holiday, simply let your guests know it will be a dry holiday. If that's a concern, tell them you understand and hope to be able to spend some time with them another day.

**#4: Add Fun Activities to Distract Others** Without alcohol, people may become a bit more interested in spending some time together as a family, doing things that are fun together. Here are some ideas but come up with your own, too.

- Host a pie-baking competition. Have each family create their own and bring it to sample. Award the winner with a spatula they can use to recreate the pie for Christmas.
- Have the kids design placemats for each person at dinner. Encourage each person in attendance to write a message to that individual on the back of the placemats. Share them at mealtime.
- Provide each person with a notecard and pencil to write down something they are thankful for and then share them or tuck them away in a memento box you add to each year

[READ MORE](#) ➔

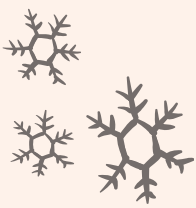
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### *Beyond The Empty Chair*



*Look beyond the empty chair  
To know a life well spent  
Look beyond the solitude  
To days of true content*

*Cherish in your broken heart  
Each moment gladly shared  
And feel the touch of memory  
Beyond the empty chair.*



## *Using AA Slogans to Deal with Holiday Stress*

### *Trying to Have a Sober Holiday? These Slogans Will Make It Your Best Yet*

The holiday season can be incredibly stressful for people who are new to recovery or AA. Maybe it will be your first time seeing extended family since you got sober. It might be the first time you encounter alcohol or other drugs in "the real world," and you don't have a sober support system there to guide you. Or maybe it's the first time you re-experience family conflict or dysfunction now that you're sober.

Everything is going to be okay. Your arrival on this page is not by accident: you already know the holidays might threaten your sobriety, and you're concerned enough about protecting your sobriety to make a plan. That's a really good start. If your heart and mind stay in the right place, and if you continue to "do the next right thing," your sobriety should find solid footing this holiday season.

With all that being said, the holidays will still be stressful. That's true for everyone—not just people who are new to recovery or AA. That's why you need a few simple AA slogans to point your heart and mind in the right direction, and to help you stay not only sober, but happy and calm too.

### *How Do Slogans Work? Are They a Spell of Some Sort?*

Now you might be wondering, "how do AA slogans help during the holidays" or "how can slogans possibly keep me sober?" The short answer: these AA slogans will focus your energy into productive thoughts and behaviors. Rather than backsliding into fear, negativity or blame, you can control your response to holiday and family stress—and you can actually rewire your brain.

Then if you can't attend an AA meeting or another support group, you can recite these slogans like a mantra, and center your mind on your own mental health and happiness—and your sobriety.

### *Here Are Seven of Our Favorite AA Slogans for the Holidays*

#### **Easy Does It**

Happiness is not a race, and neither is recovery. In fact, any attempts to hack or crack them are likely to have the opposite effect. Happiness is achieved not in its reckless pursuit, but as a complement to other sensations and feelings of fulfillment. Recovery is much the same way, and you will get nowhere fast by attempting to speed-run it.

Go easy. Take time for yourself and your recovery. Be present and mindful, and find a physical or mental space from which you draw calm energy. You are on a long journey toward happiness and fulfillment; you have to go easy or you will never get there.

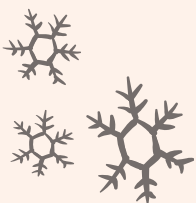
#### **First Things First**

Some priorities change over time, but your sobriety should always come first. This holiday season, you might be especially tempted to move your priorities around, preferring to nail down the shopping list or hang out with family. That's completely fine, but your recovery must still come first. Remember, "Whatever you put before your sobriety, you are likely to lose."

If you want to balance all your priorities and have a good sober holiday, come prepared with a list of self-care techniques that help you re-invest in long-term sobriety. Then practice them, no matter the cost, on a regular schedule and whenever you feel the need.

#### **Live and Let Live**

What a great reminder that we all do things differently, and that's okay. Maybe your uncle drives you nuts, or maybe your parents have holiday expectations or traditions that send you up a wall. Live and let live. Everyone has their own set of priorities, and everyone attempts to fulfill their needs differently. There's nothing wrong with that, so long as your sobriety isn't in danger. Set boundaries whenever necessary, then tend to your own garden and let others tend to theirs. You should be all the calmer for it.



## *Preparing For The Holidays*

- Know your spending limit. Lack of money is one of the biggest causes of stress during the holiday season. This year, set a budget, and don't spend more than you've planned. It's okay to tell your child that a certain toy costs too much. Don't buy gifts that you'll spend the rest of the year trying to pay off.
- Give something personal. You can show love and caring with any gift that is meaningful and personal. It doesn't have to cost a lot. Or use words instead of an expensive gift to let people know how important they are to you. Make a phone call or write a note and share your feelings.
- Get organized. Make lists or use an appointment book to keep track of tasks to do and events to attend.
- Share the tasks. You don't have to do everything yourself. Share your "to do" list with others. Spend time with friends and family while you share tasks like decorating, wrapping gifts, and preparing the holiday meal.
- Learn to say no. It's okay to say "no" to events that aren't important to you. This will give you more time to say "yes" to events that you do want to attend.
- Be realistic. Try not to put pressure on yourself to create the perfect holiday for your family. Focus instead on the traditions that make holidays special for you. And remember that just because it's a holiday, family problems don't go away. If you have a hard time being around your relatives, it's okay to set limits on your time at events and visits.



## *Resources*

Al-Anon Family Groups

[CLICK HERE](#)

Nar-Anon Family Groups

[CLICK HERE](#)

Let's Get Real Inc.

[CLICK HERE](#)

ME WE Family Education  
& Support Group

[CLICK HERE](#)



My Recovery Day

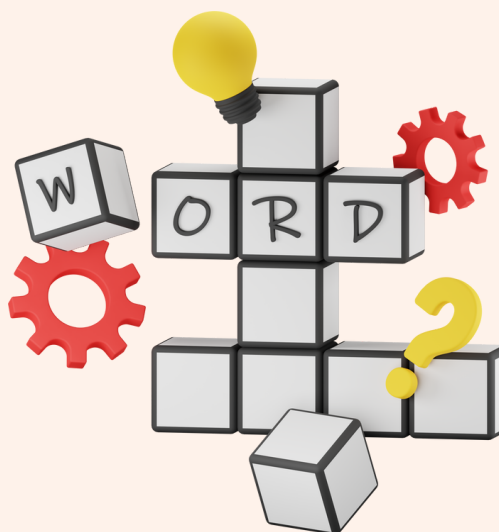
[CLICK HERE](#)

United Way  
First Call For Help  
211

[CLICK HERE](#)

## *Take A Break!!!*

Give holiday chores and hustle and bustle (and yourself) a break, and sit down with your favorite son, daughter, grandchild, niece/nephew or neighbor and work on a puzzle together.



Easy

Med

Hard

*Serenity Prayer*

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom  
to know the difference*