

The Coping with Holiday Stress Worksheet: Creating My Own Plan for a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season

The American Psychological Association conducted a “holiday stress” poll which revealed that more than eight of every 10 Americans anticipate stress during the holiday season (American Psychological Association, 2015). Heightened stress during the holidays can trigger unhealthy behaviors, such as overeating and drinking to excess. But there are other coping behaviors that you can adopt during the holiday season that are both healthier and longer-lasting. This “Coping with Holiday Stress Worksheet” introduces nine important strategies to help ensure a happy and healthy holiday season.



You can use this interactive worksheet to:

1. *Identify the main sources of your holiday stress*
2. *Learn to make healthier choices during the holiday season*
3. *Develop a plan to manage your holiday stress*
4. *Make the holiday season a happier one*

1. Let go of unrealistic expectations:

You can't recreate the past
You can't have perfect holidays

[Fill in the blank] One thing I would like to have happen this holiday season that probably won't is:

2. Acknowledge and express your feelings honestly

Give yourself permission to feel a sense of loss because of illness, divorce, death, separation, anxiety, dread, or other pressures

[Fill in the blank] One thing I'm feeling today as the holidays are approaching is:

3. If you tend to isolate, try to keep busy instead:

Invite others to get together
Be proactive, not reactive
Stay active. Get out. Go for a walk. Window shop

[Fill in the blank] One friend or group I could get together with is:

4. Don't expect issues with others to disappear just because it's the holiday season

If possible, reduce the amount of time you plan to spend with difficult family members or friends

Let go of past conflicts and resentments

Acknowledge feelings related to the holidays, but try to avoid associating the holidays with unresolved family issues or a painful childhood

Respect and support each family member's choices about participation in family activities, and allow for changes in plans and participation, when possible

Keep expectations realistic and learn to forgive

Balance your own needs with your family's needs

[Fill in the blank] One positive and supportive family member or friend I will spend time with is:

5. If you are struggling with loneliness or are facing the loss of a loved one with whom you have shared the holidays

Go to a place where you can find support and encouragement

Spend time with people who care about you

Volunteer your own time or your family's time to help others. Helping others can take the focus off one's own pain

Accept feelings of sadness. These feelings may not go away just because holiday cheer abounds

[Fill in the blank] One activity I will do to deal with loneliness or loss is:

6. Prepare for the extra intensity

Eliminate stressful or unnecessary activities or chores

Devote time to relaxation and rejuvenation

Do something special for yourself. Make an appointment with yourself to do something you enjoy

Always seek support if you need it. Don't be embarrassed to ask for help any time of the year

[Fill in the blank] One stressful activity I can abandon is:

[Fill in the blank] One relaxing and rejuvenating activity I can enjoy is:

[Fill in the blank] One special thing I will do for myself is:

7. Re-evaluate your holiday traditions. Are they too stressful or time-consuming?

[Fill in the blank] One "tradition" I may need to give up is:

8. Beware of over-indulgence

Eat, drink, and spend *in moderation*

Stick to non-alcoholic drinks

Set spending limits

Increase physical activity

[Fill in the blanks] I will spend no more than \$_____ per person on gifts.

One way I will increase physical activity (exercise) is to _____

for _____ minutes per day.

9. Remind yourself of the true meaning of the holidays that you celebrate

Focus on what is most important to you about the holiday season

[Fill in the blank] This year I will remind myself of the importance of:

Congratulations on completing your very own *Plan for a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season!*

Please note that the plan that you have created to cope with holiday stress and ensure healthy and happy holidays can be utilized to manage stress and promote health throughout the year.

A SARDAA volunteer with a 26-year history of schizoaffective disorder and extensive experience as a health care professional wrote this article and adapted this worksheet from the November 2009 version of Cigna's "Coping with Holiday Stress" Wellness Workbook.

Next in this series will be an article by the same author entitled, "SARDAA Offers Tips for Peace of Mind during the Holiday Season."