

## Mental Health Around the Holidays Tip Sheet

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- **Dealing with the grief or sadness this season can bring in a healthy way:**
  - **Celebrate a person's life** by hanging pictures, make space and time with others who are also grieving to share positive memories, funny stories
  - **Make a certain food that was enjoyed by someone who you lost** as a tribute and celebration
  - Don't run from the sadness- spend some time to honor those feelings, feel those feelings, and then find a distraction or another activity after honoring those feelings. For example, spend an hour or two looking at photos, feeling the grief or sadness or longing, then go outside for a walk or talk with family/friends or do something else that you enjoy
- **Combatting seasonal depression/lack of sunlight:**
  - This one is a tricky one because we have absolutely no control over the weather.
  - **Look for beauty.** Go outside and take pictures of things that you find beautiful despite the grayness - an ice crystal on a flower, or snow on an evergreen, or the tracks of an animal in the snow- gray lighting is actually really good for pictures, so you could also get dressed in cozy clothes with family or friends, go out, and have a frozen photo shoot followed by hot chocolate or hot cider
  - **Get in some exercise** - use a YouTube video as a guide, go on a run, go to the gym. It doesn't have to be an hour-long workout to be beneficial - spending even 5 minutes working out or doing physical activity is better than doing none at all, and there is a lot of evidence supporting that doing physical activity has a positive impact on your brain.
- **How to manage stress (money, busyness, being around people, etc.):**
  - **Build in some self-care time.** Literally put in on your calendar, mark the day (or days) off as a DO-NOTHING day, and then tell people you are busy that day- because you will be busy taking care of yourself. Put in on the calendar now, so you don't have to wrestle with guilt or over-commitment later,
  - Again, find time to exercise or go outside for even a couple minutes. **Being outside and exercise are both excellent ways to relieve stress.**
  - Go to bed on time!!! Loss of sleep is a huge contributor to increases in stress, anxiety, and difficulty making decisions (such as what gift to give someone, or what holiday party to attend). **Prioritize sleep.**
  - **Avoid certain "quick fixes" for stress** - like spending a lot of time playing games on your phone, engaging in substance use, or watching TikTok or YouTube videos. While these can feel rejuvenating, there is evidence to support the idea that they actually increase dissatisfaction and feelings of stress. There are a couple of reasons for this:
    - Spending time procrastinating on your phone or with a drink in hand will likely lead to increased time pressure and stress once you put the phone down or sober up;
    - Your phone and substances give you quick hits of dopamine, which overwhelm your brain- the subsequent depletion of dopamine that comes after you put the phone down or sober up makes every task feel more daunting, more boring, and more stressful. Avoiding these quick fixes will generally lead to more motivation and greater satisfaction at the end of the day