



National Institutes of Health  
*Office of Management*

# The Holiday Resilience Guide

Brought to you by the  
NIH Employee Assistance Program



# Resilience Guide

The holiday season is often seen as a time for celebration and joy, but for many, it can also bring stress, sadness, or anxiety. Whether it's the pressure to meet expectations, financial worries, or feeling overwhelmed by the season's demands, these emotions are more common than you might think.

This kit is designed to help you navigate those tough moments with practical tools and self-care practices that promote relaxation, emotional well-being, and mental clarity. Inside, you'll find resources to manage stress, reframe negative thoughts, and prioritize your mental health during the holidays.

We recognize that the concepts in this toolkit will look different for each person, as they are influenced by individual context and culture. This is not an exhaustive list of all the skills and methods available to you, but rather a starting point to get you thinking. We hope it helps spark ideas for ways you can care for yourself and support your well-being throughout the holiday season.

Remember, it's okay not to feel "perfect" or overly festive. Be kind to yourself, and take small steps to nurture your mind and body. By doing so, you can create a more peaceful, joyful holiday experience, putting your well-being first.

Setting Boundaries

Navigating  
Challenging  
Interactions

Continuing  
Connections

Building Supportive  
Spaces

Maintaining  
Routine

Self-Care

Mindfulness

# Cultural Consideration

As we enter the holiday season, it's important to remember that this time of year means different things to different people, especially due to cultural and religious differences. Not everyone celebrates the same holidays, and even within a single holiday, traditions can vary. For example, some may celebrate Christmas, while others observe Hanukkah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, or no holiday at all.



These differences affect how we experience the season, from large family gatherings to quiet reflection. The holidays can also be stressful for those who don't identify with mainstream celebrations, potentially leading to feelings of isolation or frustration.

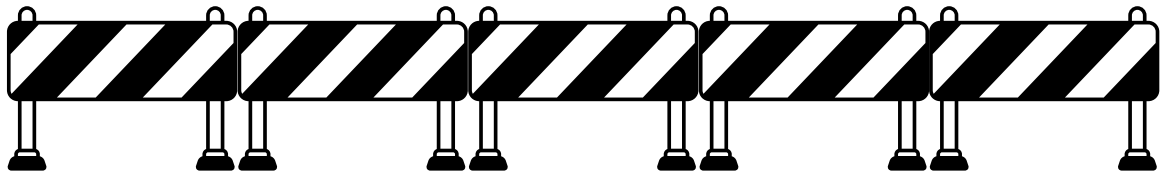
To foster inclusivity, we should respect diverse traditions and be sensitive to those who may experience stress, sadness, or loneliness during this time. By encouraging open dialogue, we can better support one another, regardless of how we observe the season.

Ultimately, our goal is to create a space where cultural differences are embraced, allowing everyone to feel seen and supported. This kit is to be a guide, and none of these suggestions are absolute. Remember, you are the expert on your circumstances. Take what you need and leave what you don't.



# Setting Boundaries

Boundaries are personal limits you set in relation to others, influenced by your principles, beliefs, relationships, and cultural values. They define what you're willing to engage in, what's acceptable, and how you'll respond if crossed. Boundaries protect your sense of self and can vary across relationships, including romantic, family, work, and personal space. While setting boundaries can be challenging, especially in certain contexts, it's important to be creative in maintaining your well-being.



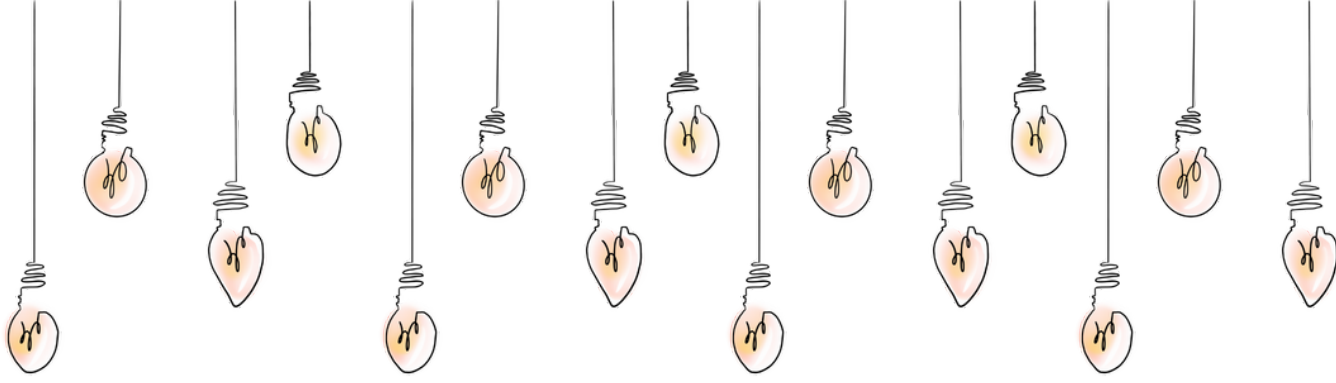
- **Time Boundaries**
  - Limit Social Events
  - Schedule "Me Time"
- **Financial Boundaries**
  - Set a Gift Budget
  - Don't Overcommit Financially
- **Emotional Boundaries**
  - Avoid Toxic Conversations
  - Take Breaks When Needed
- **Family and Relationship Boundaries**
  - Set Limits on Visits
  - Respect Your Pace
- **Self-Care Boundaries**
  - Honor Your Health
  - Say No to Overextension



- **Tips for Communicating Boundaries**
  - **Be Clear and Direct:** Use simple statements like "I can't make it" or "I'd rather not talk about this right now."
  - **Stay Firm but Kind:** You don't need to apologize for taking care of yourself.
  - **Revisit Regularly:** Check in with yourself as the season progresses and adjust boundaries as needed.



# Navigating Challenging Interactions



The holiday season offers time to reconnect with friends and peers, but it can also mean spending time with those who may not share the same beliefs, values and opinions.

How can we handle being around those who are more critical or unsupportive?



- Stay calm to better control your thoughts and reactions.
- Try to understand their perspective to plan a thoughtful response.
- Seek support and guidance from someone you trust when you are unsure how to respond.
- Focus on what can be done in the moment to help resolve the situation.
- Be prepared with stories you're comfortable sharing, so you can participate while controlling what you disclose.
- Prepare backup topics to smoothly redirect the conversation if needed.
- Set realistic expectations, understanding that not everything may go as planned, and that some behaviors or dynamics may not change.
- Give yourself permission to let go of the past, not forgetting or excusing hurt, but freeing yourself to focus on your future.

# Continuing Connections

During the holiday season, staying connected with the people we care about can make all the difference. Whether you're close by or miles apart, taking the time to reach out and share moments together helps us feel supported and less alone. By focusing on meaningful connections, using technology to stay in touch, and being present with each other, we can create positive, lasting memories that strengthen our relationships and resilience.

- **Focus on Quality, Not Quantity:** Prioritize meaningful one-on-one interactions or small gatherings, rather than trying to see everyone or attend every event.
- **Use Technology:** Schedule video calls or send texts and voice messages to bridge the gap when physical distances or busy schedules make in-person meetings difficult.
- **Reimagine Traditions:** Reimagine old traditions by giving them a fresh twist to fit current circumstances - like hosting a virtual gift exchange, sharing a holiday playlist, or writing letters to each other about the year.
- **Share Experiences:** Bond over shared activities like watching the same movie or reading the same book.
- **Nurture Existing Relationships:** Keep up with regular check-ins and offer support when needed. Reach out to friends or family who may be alone or struggling.
- **Set Intentional Moments:** Schedule regular calls or messages to keep connections strong throughout the season.



# Building Supportive Spaces

Creating supportive spaces during the holiday season can provide a sense of safety, connection, and relief from stress.

Whether through physical spaces for retreat or emotional support from trusted people, these environments allow you to recharge, maintain your well-being, and navigate the season with greater ease. Here are some practical tips for building those spaces in a way that feels nurturing and sustainable.

- **Surround Yourself with Compassionate People**
  - Lean on trusted friends or family who make you feel safe and understood.
  - Seek out like-minded communities, online or in-person, for additional support.
- **Create “Escape” Zones**
  - Identify a quiet space to retreat to if needed—whether physical or mental—to recharge.
  - Use grounding techniques like deep breathing if you can’t physically leave.
- **Stay Flexible**
  - Be prepared to adjust plans if a situation becomes overwhelming.
  - Let go of the expectation that everything needs to be perfect.

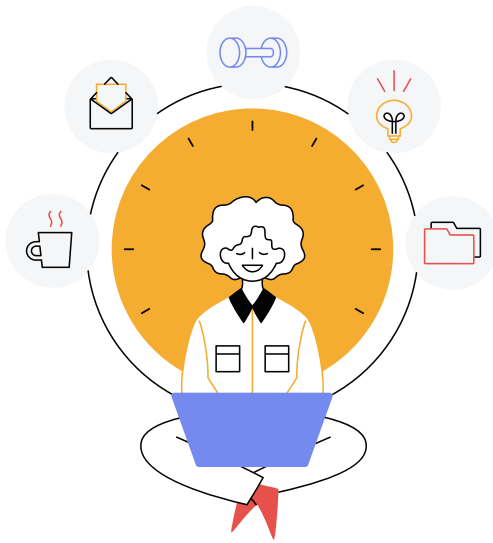


- **Be Clear About Your Needs**
  - Communicate your comfort levels ahead of time (e.g., avoiding certain topics or needing space).
  - Ask trusted individuals for support if you need help voicing your needs.
- **Set Up a “Check-In” System**
  - Arrange for a trusted friend or family member to check in with you during events.
  - Text or call in between gatherings to decompress and assess how you’re feeling.
- **Create a “Cocoon” for Yourself**
  - Designate a peaceful retreat space at home for unwinding after challenging events.
  - Surround yourself with comforting items—like blankets, music, or self-care rituals—to recharge.





# Maintaining Routine



The holiday season can feel chaotic, with more events, family gatherings, and often, a shift in work schedules. Keeping a consistent routine can provide stability and structure, which can help reduce stress and improve your mental well-being.

## Ask yourself

- What elements of my usual routine can I maintain or adapt to help me feel more present and less overwhelmed this holiday season?
- What habits or activities brings you joy?
- Are there new routines or habits would you like to establish?

## Consider

- Set daily priorities by maintaining a regular schedule for work, meals, sleep, and exercise to stay focused.
- Manage your workload by planning ahead, staying organized, and setting boundaries. If you need time off, communicate early.
- Adapt your routine for holiday events while keeping essential habits like exercise and relaxation intact.

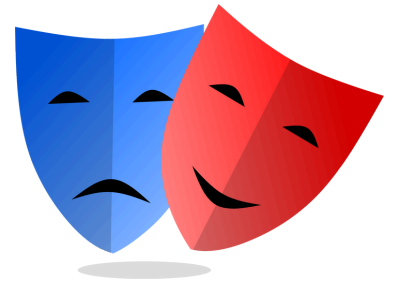


# Self Care

When it comes to self care make sure you're aware of the resources in your personal toolkit, so you're not caught off guard or uncertain about what to do when stress hits. What activities, tasks, exercises, or strategies do you intentionally use to cope with stress? What helps you feel better in those moments?

## Emotional:

Consider actions that nurture your emotions, like meaningful conversations, journaling, reflecting on positive experiences, seeking therapy, expressing emotions, spending time with trusted people, setting boundaries, and letting go of what no longer serves you.



## Physical:

Focus on activities that promote well-being, like wearing comfy clothes, getting sunlight, walking, hugging, practicing yoga, stretching, and breathing exercises.

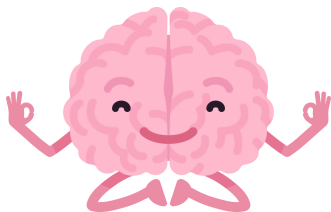
## Community:

Connect with the world through nurturing spirituality, building community, spending time in nature, volunteering, and finding meaning in your experiences.



## Mental:

Let's focus on activities that stimulate your mind, like reading, learning a new skill, reflecting, increasing self-awareness, organizing, doing puzzles, exploring creativity, or planning tasks.



# Mindfulness

When stressed or anxious, we often dwell on the past or worry about the future. Mindfulness encourages us to return to the present moment by focusing on what's happening right now without judgment.



- **Pay attention** to your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations.
- **Observe** what's happening inside and around you—without needing to change or fix anything.
- **Describe** what you notice, without adding judgment. Simply name your thoughts and emotions for what they are, not what they might signify.
- **Acknowledge** that a thought is just a thought, and a feeling is just a feeling.
- **Be present** in the moment. Focus on the here and now, embracing spontaneity and responding flexibly to your environment.
- **Harmonize** your thoughts and emotions. Recognize that both can coexist without conflict. By accepting both, you take control of your life, rather than letting your thoughts or feelings control you.

# Resources

## Employee Assistance Program:

- **Phone:** (301) 496-3164
- **Website:** [www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/eap](http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/eap)
- **Location:** NIH main Campus: Bethesda Building 31 Rm. B2B57
- **Hours:** Monday - Thursday: 8am - 5pm. Friday 7:30am - 4pm.
- **Services:** In-person, virtual, or telephone short term counseling.

- [Wellness@NIH](#)
- [Work-Life@NIH](#)
- [Employee Well-Being Listserv](#)
- [Civil](#)
- [Ombudsman](#)
- [Mindful Fed Program](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [NIH Office of Research Services Resources & Referral Services](#)
- [NIH Wellness Facebook Group](#)

**Need Immediate support?  
Call or text: 988  
(24/7, multiple languages)**