

(Un)Happy Holidays

A guide for making the season brighter.



It's that time of year again, and no matter how you celebrate, (or don't), the holidays can be a lot.



PROS

- ✓ TURKEY AND STUFFING
- ✓ PRESENTS
- ✓ FESTIVE DECORATIONS
- ✓ FAMILY GATHERINGS
- ✓ HOLIDAY MUSIC



CONS

- ✗ TURKEY AND STUFFING
- ✗ PRESENTS
- ✗ FESTIVE DECORATIONS
- ✗ FAMILY GATHERINGS
- ✗ HOLIDAY MUSIC



UNDECIDED

- THOSE HOLIDAY MOVIES ON THAT ONE CHANNEL WITH ESSENTIALLY THE SAME PLOTS AND CAST MEMBERS ENDLESSLY LOOPING FOR TWO MONTHS

Every Chocolate Coin Has Two Sides.

For many, the holiday lights, food, gifting, traditions, and family get-togethers are joyful things. They spend the season joyously humming "Jingle Bells," and seem to easily fall right in with the cousins they see once a year, chatting merrily at holiday tables.

For others, the extra noise, financial and societal pressure, and family expectations can be overwhelming, causing stress, anxiety, and even difficult feelings of sadness or loneliness. They might be screaming silently on the inside and may feel disconnected when amongst their cousins or on their own.

It's Not All Sugarplums.

Whether the season fills you with a sense of childish wonder or leaves you wondering where your wonder went, it can be a tough time of year to navigate.

Consider these recent statistics showing that, among U.S. adults during the holidays:

- **88%** felt more stressed.
- **70%** felt lonelier.
- **11%** felt extremely lonely.

Clearly, stress and disconnection are as ubiquitous as candy canes this time of year. So, if you find yourself sniffing a whiff of panic under the intoxicating scents of pine and gingerbread from November through January, you're not alone.

A Seasonal Survival Recipe

Fortunately, adopting a few mindful strategies can help combat stress and feelings of loneliness or disconnection, not only during the holidays but also throughout the year.

Master Tip: Cope Ahead – Coping ahead helps you better navigate difficult emotions by anticipating potentially problematic situations and imagining how you'll effectively cope with or overcome them.

Start by envisioning a challenging scenario you might encounter, like repeated emotional arguments at family gatherings; or being on your own during the holiday. Visualize it in detail – where are you, who's there, what's happening, what are you feeling? Now, imagine yourself handling the situation calmly and effectively. Plan specific actions: breathing calmly and [using these tips to communicate instead of arguing](#); scheduling a call with friends or family, or an enjoyable activity to [ease loneliness](#). By mentally rehearsing these positive actions, you ensure that when the moment arrives, you won't be reacting; you'll be enacting an intentional plan.

Consider the following as standalone strategies, or as part of your cope ahead approach:



Say No to the FOMO – Idealized expectations and pictures of the “perfect” life or holiday proliferate during this season and build a kind of [social contagion](#). But there's no such thing as a perfect anything. Not holidays, families, gifts, or relationships. Trying for perfection only leads to stress and disappointment, so focus instead on achievable things that make you happy. And remember, whatever perfection someone presents in their annual holiday letter or online always glosses over reality, so take it with a grain of salt.



Make New Traditions – If you struggle with meeting grandiose expectations or visiting three or four different households during the holidays, try for something simpler. Rotate

in-person visits with video chats to cut down on travel. Consider choosing a charity for the family to support vs. buying multiple gifts. If you'll be on your own on days of celebration, reach out to friends and arrange dinner or coffee earlier in the season, then make a date with yourself to do something you enjoy like watching movies, playing a sport, reading, or cooking on the actual holiday.



Be Around the Right People – Sometimes, our own family can make us feel isolated and different or treat us as if we're still twelve. (See above about emotional family arguments.) When that's the case, actively seek out family members who get you and respect who you are and enjoy your holiday pie next to them. If you anticipate spending the holidays alone and don't want that, try to volunteer somewhere. Think outside the box. It's easy to think “soup kitchen,” but there are many other opportunities, like reading or chatting with residents at senior centers. Or just find a public space where you can be around others reading a book or enjoying a cup of coffee.



Be Kind to Yourself – If you're stressed and frazzled by the season, slow down. Practice [self-care](#), [healthy boundaries](#), and remember that it's OK to say “no,” even during the holidays. If you're feeling lonely, stop and give yourself a [somatic hug](#), and try to remember that loneliness is a feeling, not a flaw. When we're lonely, our inner voice might whisper that no one cares, or that we're not worthy of love or friendship. Counter that by recalling the people in your life who do care and take a moment to be grateful for them. Then, make a plan to get together in the near future.

Finally, remember that the holidays only come once a year and are, mercifully, only here for a short time. Using the tips above can help you not only get through it but maybe even find greater joy in the season.

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