

## Simplify the Season

Is the holiday season something you look forward to with pleasure? Or is it one of those times you grit your teeth as though headed into battle?

Well, here is some good news. With the right attitude and some planning, you might just be able to get through it all with a minimum of stress and a maximum amount of pleasure and fun. The difference is in how

well you plan in advance. By setting priorities, keeping it simple, guarding your time and having moderate expectations, you can enjoy your holiday season more.

### A Personal Experience

How you anticipate the holiday season is more personal than you might think. It is based on your past experiences, your expectations and what you perceive is expected of you by others. With the usual round of office parties

and private entertaining, the deluge of holiday advertising, the celebrity television specials and “elevator music” of classical and popular carols, it can get to be a bit much.

When reflecting on holidays in the past, most people probably don't remember what gifts they gave or received (or even what they ate). More often than not, they remember the people they were with and the times they shared with loved ones. Some recollecting on past holidays can be the key to a more relaxed and enjoyable time this year.

### Prioritize

Try to determine what is important to you, not what others tell you is important. Is an out-of-town family gathering realistic this year, or might you be better off spending time with family in town? If single, could you celebrate with a circle of friends? Be honest about your values and limitations before making concrete plans. If you decide on traveling to visit friends or family, make arrangements well in advance of the season to take advantage of better travel fares and avoid the stress of last minute travel planning.

### Home for the holidays

If visiting parents and siblings, the “home for the holidays” scenario can be bittersweet. It's normal for all concerned to fall back into familiar (yet outdated) roles. It's easy to feel like you did as a child when visiting your parents — and difficult for them to see you as an adult. People often resume the childhood roles they had with their adult brothers or sisters. Old feelings and resentments can surface.

To help ease some of the tension, plan some new activities with your family. Spend time with each individually, apart from the other family members. Take your parents out to lunch or dinner. Visit with old friends. Remember to cherish the time spent with your family and temper any disappointments with the knowledge that you are visiting, not moving back in. You will soon return to your current home and routine.

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## Tame holiday tasks

Time is more limited during the holiday rush. Being realistic about what you can accomplish can save you energy as well as time. Focusing on getting every detail tended to (like baking those holiday cookies from scratch), may not be worth it if what is important to you is sharing time with those you care about. Set priorities about which parties you will attend and who you really want to visit.

## Gifts of silver and gold?

Another important priority to address is your financial status. What can you realistically afford to spend on presents? If charging gifts, how much and how soon will you be able to fully make payments. Often a budget for the holiday season — to include gifts, entertaining and travel — can help you be realistic about your financial resources well in advance of the season.

## Keep it simple

It's not hard to feel stressed by the holiday season. After all, you can find suggestions telling you how to make the perfect meal, buy the best gift, and give the best party. To make it enjoyable for everyone, you included, it's best to keep it simple.

## A personal touch

Often a holiday card with an update of the past year's events is more meaningful to out-of-town friends and relatives than an impersonal gift. Pot-luck dining means less wear and tear on you and gives your guests the opportunity to bring their favorite holiday foods to the meal. Besides, special group dining experiences are more in the holiday spirit of including everyone in on the festivities-and in on the cleanup.

Remember the fun you had as a child making holiday presents and decorations? Try to approach this year's holiday projects from that perspective. Use your creativity when it comes to holiday decorating and gifts.

Decorations can be made from garden greens and pinecones foraged from the yard. Holiday cookies, candy canes, licorice ropes and strung popcorn can decorate the tree.

Young children often make projects in school that can be displayed as part of a family's home holiday décor.



## Holiday outings

A drive through neighborhoods to view holiday decorations can be as magical as any holiday musical or theatrical production — without the crowds and the expense. If you have children you may all enjoy reading aloud holiday stories or a seasonal book. Rent some holiday videos, build a fire and enjoy some quality family time.

## Guard your valuable time

During the holiday season, there may be more to do than you have time to do it all in. Trying to squeeze everything into the season you think needs doing may be unrealistic and very stressful. Here is where time management is essential to your effectiveness and to your well-being.

## RSVP in the negative

Don't be afraid to turn down invitations. Be selective and choose those parties and events you most want to attend. If you are organizing an event, delegate tasks to others. Instead of hosting a holiday dinner alone, plan a progressive meal with family or friends.

You will all have a more enjoyable, less stressful time by sharing the load of entertaining. If you have young children, make arrangements with other parents and form a childcare pool. Taking turns entertaining each other's children gives you all time to run errands or even relax. Remember that when all else fails, simply saying "No" when you're on overload is the best time management technique of all.

## Focusing on food

There is more emphasis on eating and drinking during the holiday season than at any other time of year. From before Thanksgiving through New Year's Day,

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celebrations focus on sumptuous feasts and toasting to a happy holiday and New Year. This season is understandably the easiest time to overindulge. However, there are a few tips to help curb your eating and drinking.

### Lighten up!

On the day of a big meal, eat lightly. When dinner comes, try to eat what you really enjoy — not the entire meal. If you do overeat, allow yourself time. Don't eat again until you are really hungry. As much as possible, stick to your regular diet, exercise and sleep patterns. If you plan to drink alcoholic beverages, pick your designated driver well in advance of the event, or call a cab. Most important of all, never drink and drive — or let any of your friends and family do the same.

Finally, remember you can make this holiday season a memorable, enjoyable and satisfying time. Planning ahead is the key.

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## 'Tis the Season for Holiday Memories and ... Holiday Stress

### Holiday Stress

We feel stress when we are overwhelmed, when we have a feeling things are out of control. Get a handle on stress before it takes over! Begin by assessing what you do and why. Holiday traditions are fine, if they are enjoyed. Ask your family what things are important to them. You may be surprised that grandmother's six-hour pudding is not one of the family favorites. And nods of approval may greet the suggestion that you no longer make a family adventure out of choosing a tree. Don't waste precious time and energy on outdated traditions.

Ask for help. If you detest writing cards, see if another member of the family will do it this year. Likewise, enlist others to assume the responsibility for some of the shopping, but stay within your budget. Money concerns are always stressful. Draw names or consolidate the individual gift hassle by buying one gift for the whole family, like a game, football or theater tickets. Make gift

wrapping a relaxed, pleasant break from the hustle and bustle, a time you and someone else can talk and sip cocoa while you get the job done. And if watching the temperature button on your turkey is not your idea of fun, let the "chef" in the family take over the job. Buy cookies for the third grade party and use that time to have lunch with a friend.

Whether you're married, divorced or a member of a blended family, juggling time between families is stressful but often necessary. Don't make the holidays a tug-of-war for the children. Plan scheduled events ahead, then stick to your plans. Turn unavoidable, unpleasant visits into "I will not get upset" visits and then do something fun to reward everyone for their forbearance.

### Holiday Memories

This may be a particularly difficult time for you if you have experienced the loss of a loved one, either recently or in years past.

It's O.K. to take time to cry and remember these treasures of our lives. They help us have a sense of self and of our roots. But know that you are living in the present and 'the way it was' is no longer. In *The Stages of Sorrow* by Kathleen Smith, an individual states: "I have learned that there is no avoiding grief within. The only way to get it out of oneself is in compassion for others." What better time than during the holidays to use this compassion in helping others? Volunteer.

Help your neighbor with her holiday cooking: it will ease her load and allow you to keep busy and think of others. Serve dinner at a shelter for the homeless or get involved with deliveries to the needy. But also be good to yourself. When you do have time on your hands, go see holiday decorations or to a movie. You may want a change of pace altogether and start a new tradition by taking that trip you have always dreamed of. The advice "keep busy" seems like the last kind of advice you want to hear right now. Taking that advice may prove to be your greatest challenge. In *Living Through Personal Crisis* by Ann Kaiser Stearns, it states "healthy grieving does not involve a denial of the past any more than it involves a refusal to embrace the future."

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## Holiday Whirl or Holiday Worries? This Year, Enjoy More and Stress Less

'Tis the season for celebrations, joy and togetherness. For some of us, though, 'tis also the time for overscheduling, overspending and being overstressed. Try these tips to help reduce your stress so that you can make the most of the season.

### Be Happy – Not Harried

Make a plan. Create a list of your priorities for the season. Is there anything you can skip? Schedule days and times for hitting the stores, baking, visiting friends and other holiday activities.

Set realistic expectations. It's impossible to ensure that everyone has a perfect holiday. Don't try to solve a year's worth of family problems during one holiday get-together.

Feel free to say, "No." You don't have to do it all. Ask relatives or friends to help out with preparing meals, decorating and shuttling out-of-town guests. Decline some invitations if you need to. This isn't always easy, but it can relieve the pressure on your schedule.

### It's All in the Family

Make connections. Use the holidays to reconnect with your loved ones. Everything else – gifts, decorations, food – isn't as important as enjoying time with the people you care about.

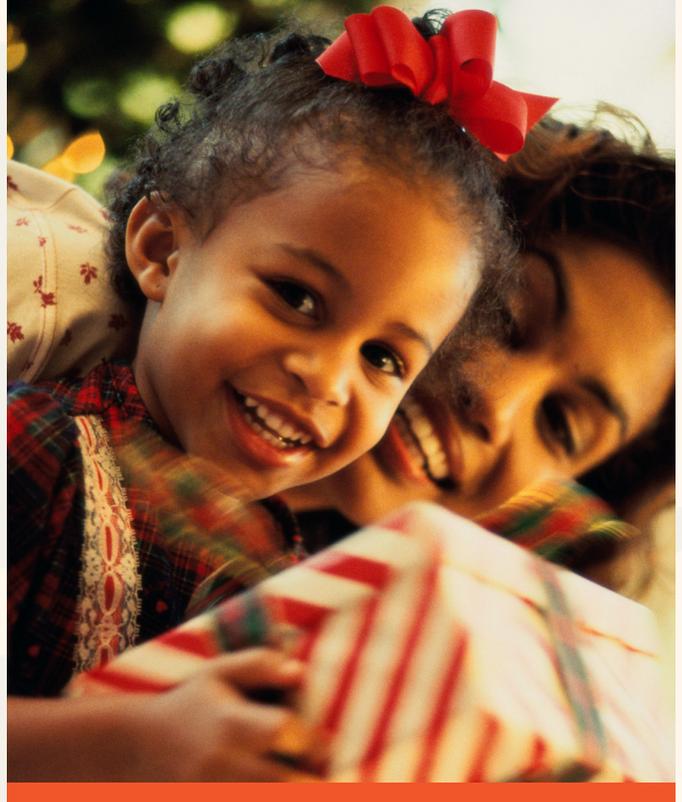
Keep it short and sweet. If family visits are stressful, limit the time spent together. Or, plan to visit during another holiday next year.

Avoid family squabbles. If you'll be spending time with people you often disagree with, try to set differences aside to help prevent conflict.

### Eat, Drink and Be Smart

Serve healthy snacks. Don't starve yourself before a big meal. This can lead to overeating. Nibble on vegetables, unsalted pretzels or nuts.

Prepare nutritious, low-fat meals. This can help balance out the inevitable goodies. Don't go overboard, but don't deprive yourself of the season's best eats.



### The Spirit of the Season

Focus on what really matters. Remind yourself of the cultural or spiritual meaning of the holidays. Try to value the time you spend with loved ones and friends.

Shine the spotlight on others. Consider volunteering at a senior center, soup kitchen or women's shelter. Focusing on others may brighten their day and yours, too.

Avoiding holiday stress isn't always easy. But, you don't have to go it alone. We're here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

## Ohio Employee Assistance Program

Telephone: 614.644.8545  
(Greater Columbus area)

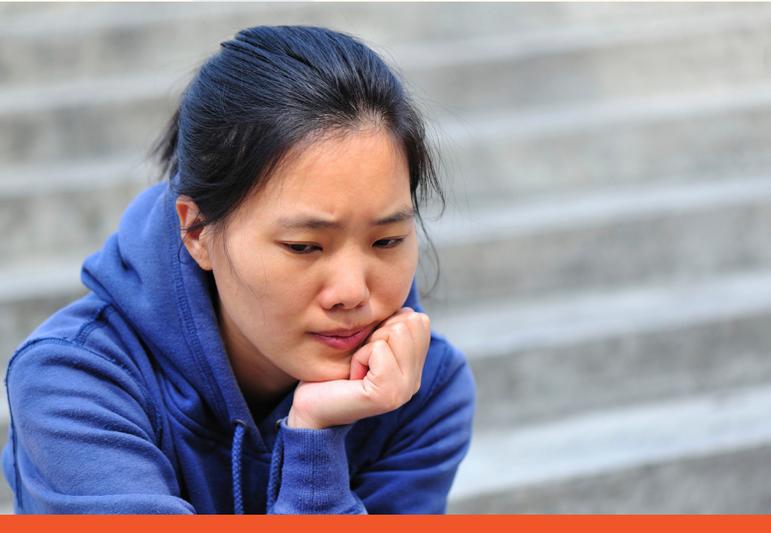
Toll-free: 1.800.221.6EAP (6327)

[www.ohio.gov/eap](http://www.ohio.gov/eap)

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# Strategies to Cope with Grief



Grief is a normal, though painful, response to loss. We experience this following the loss of friends and family through death, divorce, misunderstandings and relocations. We also can experience grief in response to loss associated with physical illness or injury, job loss or other significant loss from any cause.

Children are affected by loss and will need the support of adults who also may be grieving.

When grieving, we may experience decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping, frequent tearfulness, difficulty concentrating, anger and/or a sense of isolation. Grief is a highly personal experience. There are no set stages or feelings that all people go through in response to all losses. One point that can be made is that our responses, thoughts and feelings come and go with varying intensity across time. There is no “right” way to grieve.

## Make time work for you

Time passes without regard to what we do with it. In the process of grief, it is important that you acknowledge your experience: your thoughts, feelings and changes in behavior across time. Anniversary dates and milestone events in our lives will often recall a loss we have had. When this happens, it is helpful to recognize it and talk about it.

## Balance your time and ask for help

Solitude can be an important element of grief for many people. Nonetheless, it is essential that we balance solitude with community. Return to and maintain as

much of your routine as you can. In addition to their usual contacts, ask friends and family to call you at scheduled intervals (three months, six months and a year after the loss or on an important date that you can anticipate an increase in your feelings of loss).

## Attend to your physical needs and appearance

It is important that you get rest and nourishment. While restful sleep and normal appetite take some time to return, you should try to eat small meals and sleep at night. Maintain daily hygiene.

## Ask for practical support

Most people want to be helpful, but it is not always easy to know what to do in response to loss. Ask for help with childcare, grocery shopping, housekeeping and other tasks, especially in the early stages of your grief.

## Avoid numbing your pain

Do not use drugs or alcohol to avoid difficult thoughts or feelings.

## Avoid making life-changing decisions

Give yourself some time to adjust to your loss before you make other significant changes.

## Maintain hope

While it rarely happens as quickly as we wish, we do progress through our grief. Having done so, we may be changed in unpredictable but meaningful ways that contribute to our own or another’s growth.

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Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line: Never wonder if your concern is suitable of the OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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### Holiday Blues

It's easy for "the blues" to follow holiday activity. Winter months and the New Year may encourage you to reflect on your failure during the past year and to dread coming events. You may find that all the preparations surrounding the holidays didn't seem worth it. Your expectations were not met. Everyone didn't get what they wanted, didn't like what you served and didn't rave about the decorations.

After-holiday blues may simply be your mind and body telling you something: that you are expecting too much from yourself, that you are taking too much responsibility for everyone's happiness. Make the resolution now to change things next holiday season. Plan to delegate duties, to do only things that were enjoyed, to say no to some things. Recognize your feelings. Then move on to the present and plan for the next year. Eat right. Exercise. Start immediately to inquire about community college classes, make an exercise schedule, reserve the beach house or begin plans for an early spring trip. Usually a change of pace or something to look forward to helps.

By Linda McClenahan. This article appeared in the Eastside Mental Health Newsletter, The Insider. Reprinted with permission.

## OEAP and you in the New Year

In an effort to continue to provide helpful and supportive services, the Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) will offer additional and enhanced services in the months ahead, including:

- Access to training courses from both OEAP and the Office of Learning and Professional Development websites;
- Improved online training requests for United Behavioral Health through OEAP. To make a request, please use the online OEAP Training Request Form;
- An updated OEAP Customer Satisfaction Survey to receive your feedback. Access the survey by visiting the OEAP website at [ohio.gov/eap](http://ohio.gov/eap);
- The launch of an OEAP Supervisor Resource Guide that will be helpful to supervisors, managers, labor representatives and employees alike.

We look forward to serving you in 2014. For questions or assistance, please contact the OEAP Office at 1.800.221.6327, or in Central Ohio call 614.644.8545.