

The Coping with Holiday Stress Worksheet:

Creating My Own Plan for a Happy and Healthy Holiday

The American Psychological Association conducted a “holiday stress” poll (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:

- Identify the main sources of your holiday stress.
- Learn to make healthier choices during the holiday season.
- Develop a plan to manage your holiday stress.
- 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. One thing I would like to have happen this holiday season that probably won't is [fill in the blank]:

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

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

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

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

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. 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 [fill in the blank]:

7. Re-evaluate your holiday traditions. Are they too stressful or time-consuming? One "tradition" I may need to give up is [fill in the blank]:

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

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.