

A Guide to Holidays with Boundaries

With shorter days and longer to-do lists, the winter months often bring a unique set of mental health challenges. If you're constantly worrying about your and your loved ones' health, it might feel like your holiday plans are doomed. Though many of us enjoy reconnecting with family members during this time, it isn't the case for every family — and we all have our limits.

Set boundaries for yourself

Here are some things to remember when the holidays are starting to feel like too much.

Acknowledge your feelings — If you've experienced loss this year or are grieving holiday traditions that can't happen, it's okay to feel sad. You're human and this period won't last forever.

Plan ahead — Make a schedule for shopping, cooking and other activities. If you stick to a schedule and a budget, you're less likely to feel overwhelmed by last-minute tasks.

Embrace new traditions — As families change and grow, so do the holidays. Be open to parting with traditions that cause you stress or that you no longer connect with, and to creating new memories and celebrating in different ways.

Say no — You don't have to participate in every activity or gathering you're invited to, especially if it impacts your mental health. It's okay to prioritize your well-being over pleasing others, even those closest to you.

Ask for help — If you're feeling constant sadness, trouble sleeping or anxiety despite your best efforts, talk to your doctor about seeing a mental health professional. Or at the very least, don't be afraid to ask loved ones to pitch in where you feel you need it: shopping, cooking, decorating, etc.

Learn to let go of familial guilt — Not everyone has the same close relationships with their families. In fact, sometimes those relationships can be the cause of deep stress. If you feel you need to limit time spent with certain family members or forgo certain gatherings, give yourself permission to do so reasonably without feeling guilty.

“Although the overwhelming majority of Americans (95%) feel that spending time with family during the holidays is important, 75% also reach a point where they feel the need to escape for a moment alone.”

—OnePoll

#HopeForTheHolidays

Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line — Text MHA to 741-741