

# Self-Compassion Strategies for the Holidays

## Purpose

This was created to assist organizations and individuals in developing strategies for self-compassion and self-care during the holidays. Holidays are often the most stressful time of the year. To get through this season, it may be helpful to create a plan to implement some of these habits.

## Habits to practice this year

### **Acknowledge your feelings**

*Allow yourself to grieve for losses over the past year. Give yourself permission to acknowledge the loss of normalcy due to ongoing humanitarian crisis, gun violence, and strife in the world, acceptance of financial limitations and ongoing toxic stress.*

### **Stop romanticizing the holidays**

*“It’s the most wonderful time of the year”. This is inaccurate for many of us. If someone close to you has recently died, or you cannot be with loved ones, realize that it is normal to feel sadness and grief. For some, the holidays are reminders of social isolation or family discord. It is healthy to take time to express your feelings. You cannot force yourself to be happy just because it is the holiday season.*

### **Reach Out**

*If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events, many of which may also be accessed virtually. They can offer support and companionship. Leaning in to trusted others is the most powerful way to feel better. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.*

### **Be realistic**

*The holidays do not have to be perfect. As families and individuals change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children cannot come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails, or videos. Recognize what you have control over, and what you do not.*

### **Set aside differences**

*Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they do not live up to all your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they are feeling the effects of this stressful time. Recognize what boundaries are most effective for you right now, given your plate is already so full.*

### **Stick to a budget**

*Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Do not try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try these alternatives:*

- o Donate to a charity in someone's name.*
- o Give homemade gifts.*
- o Start a family gift exchange*
- o Consider spending time together instead of spending money.*

### **Plan Ahead**

*Set aside specific days for virtual and in-person shopping, baking, visiting friends, and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. This will help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. Plan your schedule recognizing that you may need to build in downtime more than usual.*

### **Cope Ahead**

*Remember to take breaks, the harder and longer you push yourselves the less bandwidth and productive you will be. Normalize stretching, drinking plenty of water, going on a quick walk, or doing something else rejuvenating before you burn out. When you have something planned that is going to cause increased stress, plan a restorative activity that you enjoy before and afterwards.*

### **Learn to say no**

*Saying “yes” when you should say “no” can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you cannot participate in every project or activity. Try to manage stress before it manages you. If it is not possible to say “no” try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.*

### **Keep up the healthy habits**

*Do not let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt, and often can impact your overall health and wellness. Read your body – recognize your personal signs of stress and distress, examining your breath rate, heart rate, digestion, energy, focus and so on. Try these suggestions:*

- o Focus on healthy foods and limit high fat foods, sweets, cheese, or drinks.*
- o Get plenty of sleep.*
- o Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.*

### **Take a breather**

*Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm. Some options may include:*

- o Taking a walk at night and stargazing.*
- o Listening to soothing music.*
- o Reading a book*
- o Taking a bath or warm shower with essential oils*
- o Using technology apps to practice mindfulness*