



Hopeful for the Holidays

The holiday season can be a time for celebration and increased stress. One way to manage holiday stressors is to recognize these feelings and create a plan to cope.

First, identify the stressor and where it falls on the [Feeling Thermometer](#) (green=comfortable, red=uncomfortable) for you.

Consider how the stressful event could connect to a difficult experience, stressor, or trauma from your past. These reminders can be internal or external.

Common external reminders:

- People, places, or things
- Holiday parties and gatherings
- Holiday sights, smells, and sounds
- Strained relationships with others

Common internal reminders:

- Physical sensations (upset stomach, muscle tension, headaches, etc.)
- Sensory experiences (such as sounds, smells, or sights)
- Uncomfortable memories

Next, identify how these reminders make you feel or react. Examples:

- Depressed, irritable, or angry mood
- Difficulties with focusing
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Increased fatigue
- Physical symptoms (upset stomach, muscle tension, headaches)
- Increased risky behaviors (substance use)

Finally, identify helpful strategies to try during the reminder/stressor. Examples:

- Give yourself the compassion to say no to stressful events (including parties).
- Have an exit strategy (“Thanks for having me, I need to go home and check on my dog.”).
- Plan answers to challenging questions or say, “I don’t want to talk about that right now.”
- Utilize breathing, relaxation, and/or mindfulness skills.
- Take a break (leave the room or go for a walk).
- Wait until everyone has cooled down to discuss any conflicts.
- Reduce substance use.
- Engage in positive self-talk (“I can do this.” “I’ve got this.” “I am strong.”).
- Identify a buddy attending the same event and enlist their support.

Create Your Hopeful Plan for the Holidays

Example:



EVENT	REACTION	REMINDER	STRATEGIES
Road trip to visit family	Anxiety, faster heart rate, sweating, overly cautious driving	Previous car accident during bad weather	Break up the trip into short distances, positive self-talk, take breaks when driving, listen to music, enlist a second driver if possible, plan for bad weather



EVENT	REACTION	REMINDER	STRATEGIES

Remember...

It is impossible to avoid all events that might cause a reminder. **When this happens, identify potentially helpful things to do after the reminder/stressful situation.**

- Recognize your strengths.
- Engage in thought replacements for any [distorted thinking](#).
- Practice reflection, perhaps through journaling.
- Talk about the event or experience with trusted loved ones.
- Praise any successes and problem solving.

Reducing stress reminders (and their impact) can be possible, especially with support.

- Consider working on the hopeful plan as a family (including trusted friends) during an upcoming [family meeting](#).
- Nurture relationships with other caring people outside of the family.
- Make time for activity (exercising, walking) and ongoing breathing, relaxation, and/or mindfulness skills.
- Maintain regular routines as much as possible and try to get enough sleep.