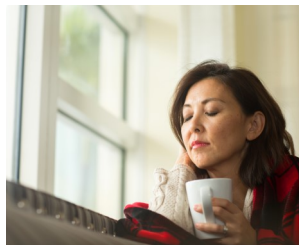




BHS A.S.S.I.S.T. Spotlight

December 2024

Your EAP is a free and confidential service, which provides assessment and short-term counseling for a variety of mental health, substance abuse and work/life related issues. To learn more about your available benefits, contact your BHS Care Coordinator at 800.245.1150.



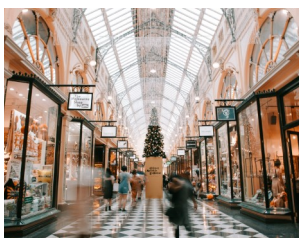
Balancing Self-Care During Holidays

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Keys to Healthy Conflict During the Holidays

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Holiday Budgeting Tips

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Recipe: Candy Cane Fudge

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Balancing Self-Care During Holidays

Traditions, expectations, pressures and the commemoration of those no longer physically present can mix in an emotional blender, producing a holiday brew from which many of us drink deeply on an annual basis. Try these four strategies to reduce the stresses associated with the season.

Check in with trusted friends and family. Improving our social connections is so important that it has become a public health priority (American Psychological Association, 2023). Express your feelings with folks who implicitly and explicitly “get” you. Choose well, avoid gossip, and do not engage in hurtful conversations. Instead, approach each dialogue with gratitude and appreciation.

Check in with yourself. It’s also good to have time to yourself. Write in a journal, take a few moments to meditate and/or pray, and get grounded or centered via deep breathing or a quick break from all the things you feel “must be done”. Some folks who enjoy exercise can arrange their schedules to get out for a brisk walk or a quick workout just to have some protected alone time.

Try to maintain a healthy routine. Consuming a well-balanced diet and drinks low in calories can help keep blood sugar steady and avoid seesawing between energy highs and lows. Try to go to bed within an hour or two of your usual time, and resist the urge to doom-scroll on a device before sleep. Hosting a meal? Delegate specific tasks to others so that you do not have to “do it all.”

Monitor and edit the negative self-talk. Because negative self-talk can carry very negative effects, such as anxiety and depression (Greenberger & Padesky, 2020), try to catch when you are sending yourself negative messages and switch it up. For instance, you might notice your mumbling to yourself, “My end-of-the-year paperwork, grades, etc., are never going to be submitted,” or “I’m bad at baking cookies,” but you can change those messages to: “It may feel like I am not keeping up right now, but it’s going to get done if I set aside 30 minutes each day to work on it,” or “I used to leave the cookies in the oven too long, and now they’re edible, even delicious!” Give yourself a break, and try not to denigrate yourself. Instead of being your worst critic, you can be your own best friend and advocate.

Make time for yourself so you do not get too overwhelmed, and use “me time” to process feelings about the season that are more complex. You might be feeling great joy and a profound sadness simultaneously this year. Give yourself the gift of time to feel, to relax, and to be fully present. You’ll be glad you did.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential assessment and counseling services. BHS is available by calling 800-245-1150 or by visiting www.behavioralhealthsystems.com.



Keys to Healthy Conflict During the Holidays

The holiday season is often filled with joy, connection and celebration, but it can also be a time when tensions rise and conflicts emerge, especially during conversations with loved ones. Whether it's differing opinions, long-standing disagreements or stress from holiday preparations, the atmosphere can sometimes shift from festive to tense. However, with a little mindfulness and preparation, it's possible to navigate these conversations with care. Here's how to avoid conflict and foster positive communication during the holidays.

Exploring the source of conflict. Expectations tend to be higher during the holidays than other times of the year. It is also a time where larger groups of people come together who aren't always on the same page about things whether it's food preferences, alcohol consumption, parenting, politics or religion. With the potential of conflicting principles in one room, there is a higher potential to feel some tension.

Taking steps to avoid it. If controversial topics are presented, it is best to lean away from those topics instead of leaning into them. Setting boundaries for yourself and the things you can control through the holiday season is important as we can only control so much.

Staying calm in a tense conversation. Using positive coping skills can help keep you calm when negative feelings arise. Whether you need to take a breather and walk around the block or find your favorite person in the room to talk privately, do whatever you need to bring your stress level down.

Pivoting the conversation. Non-verbal cues and how you are communicating can be incredibly helpful in leading the conversation in a more positive way. Things like keeping your voice in your regular tone, maintaining eye contact and refraining from showing big emotions is a good place to start.

You can often tell when a conversation is no longer productive when people are only listening to respond, are unwilling to hear the other person out or are just talking in circles. In these cases, it may be best to agree to disagree and move on. Let it be known that all parties are entitled to their beliefs and feelings, even if they differ.

If you are experiencing stress this holiday season, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help. Access your benefits by calling 800-245-1150 or by visiting www.behavioralhealthsystems.com.



Holiday Budgeting Tips

The holiday season is a time for joy, connection and celebration, but it can also be expensive if not managed properly. A well-planned holiday budget ensures you can enjoy the festivities without financial stress. Here are 10 ways to budget your money for the holidays:

Set a spending limit for gifts. Create a list of people you plan to buy for, and set a spending cap for each individual.

Take advantage of holiday sales and discounts. Timing your purchases can have a significant impact on your holiday budget. Sales are excellent opportunities to snag discounts on gifts and holiday essentials.

Get creative with decorations. Save money by reusing or making your own decorations.

Budget for non-gift expenses. Non-gift expenses such as travel and dining can add up. Create a separate budget for these items.

Use a cash-only system. Withdraw cash and place it in envelopes. Once the cash is gone, your spending in that category is done.

Focus on experiences over material gifts. Memories often mean more than material things, so consider gifting experiences rather than items. Plan a family outing, host a cozy movie night or bake holiday cookies together.

Set aside money throughout the year. Avoid the stress of last-minute budgeting by preparing for potential expenses in advance with a dedicated holiday savings fund at the beginning of the year.

RECIPE: Candy Cane Fudge • 20 Minute Prep Time • 2 Hour Chill Time

Ingredients • nonstick cooking spray • 2 (10 ounce) packages vanilla baking chips • 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk • 1 1/2 cups crushed candy canes • 1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract • 1 dash red or green food coloring

Instructions • Line an 8-inch square baking pan with foil; spray with nonstick spray. • Combine vanilla chips and sweetened condensed milk in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir until chips are almost melted; remove from heat and continue to stir until smooth. Stir in candy canes, peppermint extract, and food coloring. • Spread evenly in the bottom of the prepared pan. Chill for 2 hours, then cut into squares.

