

SOV Webinar: Preparing for the Holidays



SOV Webinar Notes

The following slides were presented at our SOV Webinar on Preparing for the Holidays, held December 14, 2022. A full recording of the presentation can be viewed at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/iUTUokrS6NQ>

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays

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"I've got the holiday spirit — exhausted and cranky!"

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays continued

As always, it is important to normalize and validate the experiences of anyone who is struggling during the holidays.

Increased Relationship Stress:

- It is not uncommon for family functions to be stressful events, and the winter holidays especially have the added pressure of popular media pushing a “picture perfect” ideal of what the holidays should be.
- Some suggestions for people feeling relational stress may be:
 - Encouraging boundaries to be put in place BEFORE the event, if possible (e.g., setting limits on what topics are acceptable to discuss and what topics are off limits – politics, finances, relationship status, pregnancy status, body image, etc.).
 - Suggesting grounding and mindfulness techniques that can be used discreetly (more later).

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays continued

- Some more helpful suggestions:
 - Help callers/service users understand how to recognize if they are being triggered by family/close relationships (mood shifts, tension shifts, breath shifts) – some common triggers are criticism, feeling pressure to be happy or positive, and financial stress related to gifts/travel/food costs/etc.
 - When someone notices that they are being triggered they can use a mindfulness or grounding technique to navigate away from the accompanying emotions (more later).
 - Recommend scheduling in dedicated self-care/quiet time throughout the holidays (more later).
- Remember that some families may not have been able to come together the last few years due to COVID, so this can bring even more added pressure.

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays continued

Isolation and loneliness:

- According to CMHA, more than one in 10 Canadians often or always feel lonely, and loneliness can be much more pervasive during the holidays.
- Some helpful suggestions for those feeling isolated may be:
 - Do something special for yourself – cook your favourite foods, go on a solo date, join a themed event, etc.
 - Volunteer by helping at a foodbank, serving holiday dinner at a community meal, offering to get groceries or spend some time with someone else who is alone, etc.
 - Reach out to others who are also looking for connection – there are whole groups of people, in-person and online, who are also wanting to connect.
 - Go “old school” and write letters/holiday cards with invitations to connect by phone or in-person.

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays continued

Financial Stress:

- The holidays are often an expensive time of year, and with inflation already impacting people, financial stress is likely to be especially high.
- Some suggestions for those facing financial stress:
 - Budget, budget, budget – don't forget to include the following costs: food and drink, decorations, increased electricity use, wrapping paper/stationery, shipping of gifts, travel, etc.
 - Write a detailed list of who you need to buy for, what you can afford to spend on each, and stick to it.
 - Consider cost-saving forms of gift-giving like home-made crafts, item swaps, shared experiences, etc.

Tips to Prepare for the Holidays continued

Some more suggestions for those facing financial stress:

- Instead of focusing on fancy holiday foods and drinks that might call for one-use ingredients, create usual favourites and add a holiday twist with decorations or wrapping – when it comes to drinks, try making holiday favourites at home instead of paying high prices for in-store/café options.
- When looking at events, think back to what events have been the most enjoyable in the past and prioritize attending those over others, then plan for those costs – factor in things like ticket prices, babysitting fees, host/hostess gifts, etc.
- Clothing can also be a major expense around the holidays if someone feels they need a new outfit for every occasion – encourage shopping in one's own closet, borrowing an outfit from a friend or family member, participating in a clothing swap, or shopping at a second-hand store whenever possible.

Self-Care During the Holidays

Self-care during the holidays can include any form of self-care someone usually relies on, but can also include the following:

- **Manage expectations:** Holidays have a way of making us want an experience where everyone gets along, but this isn't always the case and dashed hopes can make things worse. If you can understand how to remain calm during any level of chaos, no one can take away your capacity to enjoy yourself.
- **Utilize mind/body practices:** The learned skills of breath work, meditation, exercising, expressive writing, restful sleep, humming, relaxing music, and other forms of mindfulness are helpful (more later).

Self-care continued

- Take time for yourself: Go for a walk before the festivities begin to arrive with a calm mindset, take a break during the day if you need it, and don't be afraid to set a strict "end time" for you to get your space back.
- Sleep: Our brains need sleep to function, and poor sleep negatively impacts our mood and interactions with others. If you make getting the right amount of sleep a priority, you'll feel surprised that you'll get everything you need to done with less negative interpersonal, physical, and mood impact from giving up sleep due to being busy.
- Delegate: You may feel it's easier to do everything yourself, but don't be afraid to delegate tasks to other people. If you set a precedent of including others, you create shared experiences which can yield a greater sense of collective joy.

Self-Care continued

- Don't overextend: It's quite common to push ourselves to make the holiday season extremely nice for our families while hoping they'll notice the enormous efforts that we made to please them. Be aware that you might not get the reactions you're hopeful for, so it's important to stay mindful of the efforts that you're putting in and asking yourself if you're comfortable overextending.
- And, again, set boundaries: When you set a holiday boundary, you're doing it because of how you felt the prior year. The boundary is a way to rescue yourself from that same feeling. Stick to it, no matter how other people react. Saying "no" to them is saying "yes" to yourself.

Discreet Mindfulness Techniques

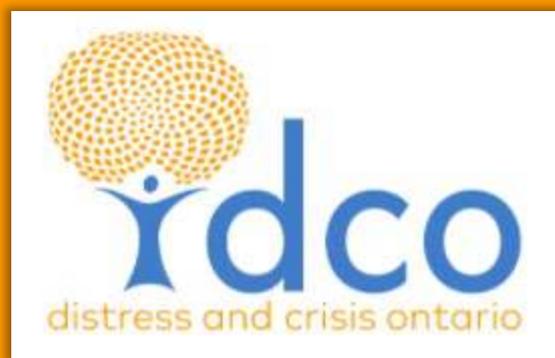
- There are many mindfulness and grounding techniques out there, and what works for one person may not work for the next, however the following are some examples of discreet mindfulness techniques that can be used in public and/or during a holiday event/gathering.
 - Take 5 slow, deep breaths – just 5 deep breaths can help you disconnect from the situation, refocus, and move on.
 - “Zone in” – put all your focus on one single task at hand, not worrying about what else is going on around you or what else needs to be done.
 - “Breathing Finger Taps” – place your hands on your lap (or against your folded forearms), take a few deep breaths to settle yourself, then press both pinkies into your lap as you inhale and count to 5, hold your breath for a moment, then exhale as you count down from 5 and release your pinkies, repeat with each of your finger pairs all the way to your thumbs, going back down to your pinkies if needed.

Mindfulness Techniques continued

- Try the 5-3-2 sequence to manage strong emotions, 5-3-2 being the number of words in each step.
 - 5 – No action in a reaction: First, recognize your emotional response and acknowledge that any action, physical or verbal, is not going to be helpful in the long run. Don't take any action while you are upset.
 - 3 – Flip the switch: Let your emotions drop enough that you can think more clearly, then make a decisive choice to come out of reaction mode.
 - 2 – Move on: Once you have returned to a calm state of mind, you'll be able to address the upsetting situation more clearly and constructively. Then you can choose how to appropriately react to the root cause of the emotional response.

References:

- Canadian Mental Health Association, *5 Ways to Protect Your Mental Health This Holiday*, <https://cmha.ca/five-ways-to-protect-your-mental-health-this-holiday/>
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- MindOwl, *How to Practice Mindfulness Throughout the Day*, <https://mindowl.org/how-to-practice-mindfulness-throughout-the-day/>
- Psychology Today, *Processing Anger with Three Steps: 5-3-2*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/anxiety-another-name-pain/202209/processing-anger-three-steps-5-3-2>



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