

Tips from counselors on how to avoid holiday stress

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CHILLICOTHE – While the holidays are a joyous time for many people they can also be very stressful.

With the nights getting longer and colder some individuals will experience seasonal depression while others will experience stress and anxiety surrounding money and family. To help the counselors at Mares Cares got together and thought of tips to help people manage their stress during this time.

Around 5% of people, according to the Cleveland Clinic, will experience seasonal affective disorder. The same study found that anywhere from 10% to 20% of people will experience a lesser form of this depression called the winter blues.

Patricia Mares recommends to patients a happy light. This UV light is meant to be used for 20 minutes a day while you are doing dishes, homework or reading and simulates being in the sun. This can help lessen the sadness that comes with nights getting longer.

While it may seem like cliché advice Alvin Mares recommends self-care

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during this time. He said you have to be able to help yourself before you can help anyone else so it is important to think of self-care as a necessity, not something that makes you selfish. Whether it is watching tv, taking a bath or participating in your hobby Mares said it is important to take care of yourself.

If things start to feel unmanageable alone the counselors remind people that it is ok to reach out for help. There are so many ways to get help, whether it be online, over the phone or in person.

During this season people tend to spend more time with family and for some this could equal more stress. One way Mares helps clients relax during these times is by helping them manage their expectations. She encourages people to be realistic and honest with themselves when creating expectations so they are not disappointed when everything is not perfect.

“I think if our expectations are a Hallmark movie, we are all going to fall short,” said Mares.

Connected to setting expectations, Teagan McFadden reminds people that they can't control everything that happens but they can control how they react. For example, you might not be able to stop your uncle from saying something you don't like from across the dinner table but you can control how you respond to him.

Setting boundaries is also a large part of managing stress during the holidays. Mares said it is important to be able to say no during these times and that saying no can help lessen the burden of the holidays. These boundaries can be about topics that can and can't be discussed during dinner or about what projects you can take on. If saying no is difficult for you you can also compromise for example maybe you can't direct the holiday play but you could help in a smaller role.

"it's OK to say learn to say no," said Mares. "It's ok to not fulfill everyone's wish."

Finally, when it comes to family stress it is important to remember that just because someone is family that does not mean they get an automatic pass into your life. The Rev. Jessica Warth said it is possible to create your own family of supportive friends and community members to spend the holidays with.

Between gift-giving and traveling the holidays can quickly get expensive. According to a survey done by the National Retail Federation 62% of shoppers this year found it important to spend money on gifts and celebrations for the holidays. However, spending more money on holidays can lead to making cuts in other parts of life or creating debt.

Mares said this time of the year is a great time to look at your budget and see if it needs adjusting. It is important to set a budget and stick to it. He said this is also a perfect time to make a new years resolution to save more money for next year and do better managing finances.

There are also many gifts that don't require any money. Megan Maxwell reminds people that gift-giving is just one of the five love languages, the others being words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time and physical touch. If money is tight consider experiences or acts of service that a recipient might like more.

Sara Flowers pointed out that social media can also add stress to the season. Seeing the perfect pictures of happy families and perfect holidays can make people feel like they did not do good enough. Mares, however, reminds people that these pictures are just one moment in time and nobody has a perfect life.

"There are people that look like they have perfect lives when actually none of us have perfect lives," said Mares. "There's Instagram perfect, Facebook perfect then there's reality."

Overall during this holiday season, it is important to listen to yourself and see what you need. As Mares said, we are the experts on ourselves so if you need a break or need to set a boundary do it. It will help you in the long run.

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