

A Moment to Mind Yourself

Self-Care Toolkit: Practical Strategies For Managing Expectations Over The Holidays

This month, the IPC's Wellness clinicians Danielle and Gina wanted to share some practical tools they've used to support clients struggling to prepare for the holidays. The holidays can be a wonderful time of the year to reflect and feel gratitude for another year of blessings. It can also herald a lot of anxiety and stress. The costs of the holidays (meals, socializing, the gifts etc.) can add to an already fraught, financial picture impacted by exorbitant grocery prices and an increased cost of living. Spending a concentrated period of time with family while struggling with mental health or substance use issues may increase our anxiety. For many others grief and loss in the last few years may make the holidays appear bleak and lonely. One of the consistent themes we hear about are the stresses related to the "expectations" of Christmas and the holidays. "I must make it the best one ever." "If I don't get them the right gift, they will be so upset". "I have to see all these people but all I want to do is crawl back in my bed". "I don't feel the way I should this year".

When it comes to managing expectations coming up to the holidays, we have some options to reduce our own anxiety and stress. Being able to have discussions with our loved ones before the holiday may go a long way to reduce unhelpful expectations, freeing everyone to enjoy the celebrations. In these conversations, re-evaluate your holiday traditions. If possible, host a family meeting, in person or on WhatsApp or Zoom, to discuss what would work best for everyone. Be honest about your need to spend less this year and encourage others to do the same. Perhaps establishing gift boundaries (Yankee Swap, cost limits \$10 or \$50 per person etc.). Maybe you can all agree on gift alternatives, like everyone providing gifts for children in the family but avoiding big gifts for all the adults. You could also explore bringing food items to share rather than relying on the same one or two people cooking for everyone. Sometimes even simplifying decorations and cutting down on dining out may also help our holiday wallets. Agree to meet people for drinks or coffee rather than an expensive party. Certainly, another way to reduce costs (and the impact on the environment) is perhaps rethink gift wrapping (reusable gift bags versus traditional wrapping paper). The purpose of the discussion is to establish that we all want to spend time with those

close to us but it does not have to be a lavish affair in order to enjoy it. Social media may heighten our need for a big splash but reminding ourselves that what we see others enjoying on Instagram and Facebook doesn't mean they are any happier or enjoy the holidays more than we are.

For those who have few options over the holidays; those who can't go home or are facing a holiday without a loved one lost to COVID, cancer or suicide, the holidays can be very daunting. It's important to find and use some tools that can help soothe and re-center us when our grief and sadness threaten to haunt us. Sometimes it can be as simple as taking a quick 5-minute walk, listening to our favorite music, talking to a trusted loved one or distracting ourselves with a book, TV show or a jigsaw puzzle. We wanted to remind readers of the quick, simple, effective strategies we shared earlier this year to re-center and ground ourselves. One of the most effective techniques to re-center is to focus on one's breathing; for example, put one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest. Make sure your abdomen is raising slightly on the inhalation and your mouth is open slightly on the exhalation. Do this for at least one minute, preferably five. It's also very helpful to practice this regularly, even when you are not stressed, so it can become second nature. These tips might not erase all your anxiety and dread, but you may notice feeling more grounded and hopeful.

For additional help and support to manage the holidays, reach out to Gina or Danielle at the Irish Pastoral Center for free and a confidential chat; 617-265-5300 or e-mail: ggallagher@ipcboston.org or downen@ipcboston.org.



THIS PAGE IS SPONSORED BY



THE
IRELAND
FUNDS
AMERICA