

7 Strategies to Boost Your Mental Health During the Holidays

The holidays are upon us. For most, like the popular song says, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year.”

But for those who struggle with mental health and substance abuse issues, the period from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day can be an especially difficult and trying time.

For someone who struggles, the holidays can be fraught with triggers. The pressure to conform to social and family expectations, interactions with family and friends, and the increased presence of alcohol, can all serve to amplify mental health and substance abuse issues.

If you struggle with substance abuse and mental health issues, a trauma-informed approach is critical.

Seven Strategies for the Holidays

1. **Don’t go it alone.** Make sure you have at least one—preferably three—friends you can call to hold you accountable, and with whom you can process your experience. Keep their numbers on speed dial.
2. **Identify your triggers.** Recognize things that get the ball rolling in unhealthy directions and remove yourself from them.
3. **Set clear boundaries.** Strategize in advance to keep yourself in the right environments, the right situations and with the right people.
4. **Be grateful.** This is a season for gratitude. And this serves us well—gratitude leads to success; resentment

leads to relapse.

5. **Serve others.** Think of Jesus Christ and how He left all the comforts of heaven for a lowly manger stall. Get out of your comfort zone; look for one person a day you can serve.
6. **Keep your appointments.** Don't cancel appointments with your therapist or miss group meetings through the holidays. In fact, the holidays can be an excellent time to add an appointment or participate in an extra group session, or even to consider a residential treatment program.
7. **Get some fresh air and sunshine.** This can be a dreary time of year—the leaves have all fallen, the temperatures drop. Enjoy time outdoors as conditions allow; get some vitamin D; breathe deeply; be refreshed.

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