

CONNECTIONS

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5 Ways to Curb Social Media During the Holidays

By Paula Durlowsky, PhD, PsychCentral (Used by permission of the author)

The holidays are fast upon us and, in the blink of an eye, Thanksgiving, Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa, and New Year's Eve will have already come and gone. Along with the holiday season comes much time spent with family from near and far, attending parties, preparing elaborate holiday dinners, and buying expensive gifts to show loved ones how much we care about them.

For some, the holidays are a time to reconnect with family and friends they might not get the chance to see at other times of the year, bringing about feelings of joy and happiness. But for others the holidays can stir up unwanted feelings of angst, depression, and anxiety, and the holidays can be triggers for eliciting feelings of low self-esteem and shame by drawing comparisons to others.

Holiday-related anxiety and depression can stem from family conflicts, divorce, complicated blended family dynamics, and recent deaths of loved ones. Also, disappointments around major life events, such as unexpected job loss or difficulty finding a job, financial struggles, and disappointments around intimate relationships can be sensitive topics that would want to be avoided and not be discussed openly at holiday gatherings.

When we feel badly about ourselves, our social media habits can exacerbate these feelings, making difficult times more difficult. Spending hours on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter witnessing friends and family enjoying their holiday season, their vacations, or celebrating momentous occasions can elicit deep feelings of depression, envy, comparisons, and shame. When we're going through tough times, setting unrealistic expectations and putting pressure on ourselves to make the holidays "picture perfect" as may seem to be the case for our "friends" on social media can set us up for feeling worse.



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Greetings City Employees,

As the winter quickly approaches, I find myself browsing the internet more for cute seasonal decorations and meals to plan for family gatherings, more than I would like! While the holidays can be a time to reconnect with family and spread holiday cheer, and social media can absolutely assist with that, it can also cause us to compare ourselves with others or view life through a filtered lens. Many are also reminded of the people in our life who we won't be sharing the season with. Read on for tips on practicing mindfulness this season, coping with grief during the holidays, and if you are like me, ways to curb social media to be more present in the moment.

We wish you well this holiday season, and a happy new year!

Hailey Krueger



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Below are 5 tips to help with curbing social media during the holidays

- 1. Gain a realistic perspective around social media.** It's normal for us to showcase our achievements and the highlights of our lives. This is part of the human condition. But, no matter how wonderful a person's life might appear on social media, life has its down moments for everyone.
- 2. Cultivate mindfulness regarding social media habits.** Work on developing mindfulness around the time of day you use social media. For example, if you have a particularly challenging day ahead of you, going on social media in the morning may not be the best decision, especially if it will trigger bad and lingering feelings, making it hard to get on with your day.
- 3. Tune into your emotions.** Before going onto social media around the holidays check in with how you're feeling. If you think seeing posts of friends and family having fun engaging in holiday activities will make you more angry, envious, sad or anxious hold off on going on social media for that hour, day, or week. Wait until you're in a better emotional place before going back on social media.
- 4. Consider joining online groups that can provide emotional support.** For some, stopping social media or even pulling back from using it as much might be an unrealistic goal. Consider broadening your virtual relationships to include support groups or joining groups and/or professionals pages that offer both advice and support.
- 5. Make an in-person plan to see a trusted friend or family member.** Having positive relationships are crucial for good mental health. So, cultivating and making an effort to maintain our important relationships is paramount and should be a priority. Whenever it's possible, up your communications to being in-person. When this is not a possibility use text or private messaging before resorting to more public and less intimate social media sites. Be conscious of not completely relying upon social media as a means of communicating with and relating to close friends and family.

As with all things in life, nothing is either all good or all bad or completely wrong or absolutely right, so striking a healthy balance between time on social media and time off and between holding on and moving on should be helpful, especially if this holiday season might be particularly challenging.

Happy Holidays!



64 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays

By Litsa Williams, *What's Your Grief* (Used by permission of the author)

1. Acknowledge that the holidays will be different and they will be tough.
2. Decide which traditions you want to keep.
3. Decide which traditions you want to change.
4. Create a new tradition in memory of your loved one.
5. Decide where you want to spend the holidays – you may want to switch up the location, or it may be of comfort to keep it the same. Either way, make a conscious decision about location.
6. **Plan ahead and communicate with the people you will spend the holiday with in advance, to make sure everyone is in agreement about traditions and plans.**
7. Remember that not everyone will be grieving the same way you are grieving.
8. Remember that the way others will want to spend the holiday may not match how you want to spend the holiday.
9. Put out a 'memory stocking', 'memory box', or other special place where you and others can write down memories you treasure. Pick a time to read them together.
10. Light a candle in your home in memory of the person you've lost.
11. **Include one of your loved one's favorite dishes in your holiday meal.**
12. Be honest. Tell people what you DO want to do for the holidays and what you DON'T want to do.
13. Make a donation to a charity that was important to your loved one in their name.
14. Buy a gift you would have given to your loved one and donate it to a local charity.
15. If you are feeling really ambitious, adopt a family in memory of your loved one. This can often be done through a church, The Salvation Army, or Goodwill.
16. **See a counselor. Maybe you've been putting it off. The holidays are especially tough, so this may be the time to talk to someone.**
17. Pick a few special items that belonged to your loved one and gift them to friends or family who will appreciate them.
18. Make a memorial ornament, wreath, or other decoration in honor of your loved one.
19. **If you have been having a hard time parting with your loved one's clothing, use the holidays as an opportunity to donate some items to a homeless shelter or other charity.**
20. Send a holiday card to friends of your loved one who you may regret having lost touch with.
21. Visit your loved one's gravesite and leave a grave blanket, wreath, poinsettia, or other meaningful holiday item.
22. Play your loved one's favorite holiday music.
23. If your loved one hated holiday music, that's okay! Play whatever music they loved.
24. Journal when you are having an especially bad day.
25. Skip holiday events if you are in holiday overload.
26. Don't feel guilty about skipping events if you are in holiday overload!
27. **Don't get trapped. When you go to holiday events, drive yourself so you can leave if it gets to be too much.**
28. Pull out old photo albums and spend some time on the holiday looking at photos.
29. Talk to kids about the holidays – it can be confusing for kids that the holidays can be both happy and sad after a death. Let them know it is okay to enjoy the holiday, and it is okay to be sad.
30. Make a dish that your loved one used to make. Don't get discouraged if you try to make their dish and you fail. **We've all been there (or, at least I've been there!).**
31. Leave an empty seat at the holiday table in memory of your loved one.

What's Your Grief is a website co-authored by two Baltimore-based mental health professionals with 20+ years of experience in grief and bereavement. Their mission is to promote grief education, exploration, and expression in both practical and creative ways. Litsa Williams has agreed to let us share a list of "64 Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays" which she wrote with the input of many of the website's followers, people who have experienced grief and bereavement in their own lives. Grief is not experienced the same by any two people, so we encourage you to take what you can and leave behind what doesn't fit for you. Further, if you or a family member ever wishes to discuss your own grief, please contact the EAP at 266-6561 for additional support and resources. - Hailey

32. If leaving an empty seat is too depressing, invite someone who doesn't have family to spend the holiday with.
33. Don't send holiday cards this year if it is too sad or overwhelming.
34. Don't feel guilty about not sending holiday cards!
35. **Create a 'dear photograph', with a photo of a holiday past.**
36. Skip or minimize gifts. After a death, material things can seem less meaningful and the mall can seem especially stressful. Talk as a family and decide whether you truly want to exchange gifts this year.
37. Put out a photo table with photos of your loved one at holiday celebrations in the past.
38. Go to a grief group. When everyone looks so gosh-darn filled with holiday cheer, sometimes it is helpful to talk with others who are struggling.
39. Skip (or minimize) the decorations if they are too much this year. Don't worry, you'll see plenty of decorations outside your house.
40. Don't feel guilty if you skip or minimize the decorations!
41. Remember that crying is okay. The holidays are everywhere and who knows what may trigger a cry-fest. **We've all been there and it is okay to cry (even if you are in the sock aisle at Target).**
42. Volunteer in your loved one's memory.
43. Let your perfectionism go. If you always have the perfect tree, perfectly wrapped gifts, and perfect table, accept that this year may not be perfect and that is a-okay. I know this is easier said than done for you type-As, but give it a try.
44. Ignore people who want to tell you what you "should" do for the holiday. Listen to yourself, trust yourself, communicate with your family, and do what works for you.
45. Seek gratitude. I am the queen of holiday funks, so I know this is tough. But try to find one daily gratitude throughout the holiday season. Write it down, photograph it, share it on Facebook. Whatever. Just look for the little things. **Here are some tips if you're struggling with it.**
46. Watch the food. Food can make us feel better in the short term (damn you, dopamine!) until we feel like crap later that we ate that whole tin of holiday cookies. Don't deprive yourself, but be careful that you don't let food become your holiday comfort.
47. **Watch the booze. Alcohol can become a fast friend when we are grieving. If that holiday party is getting to be too much, head home instead of to the open bar.**
48. If you are stressed about making the holiday dinner, ask someone else to cook or buy dinner this year.
49. If you are stressed about the crowds at the mall, cut back on gifts or do your shopping online.
50. Splurge on a gift for you. Grief can make us feel a little entitled and self-involved, and that is okay sometimes (within reason, of course). Splurge on a holiday gift for yourself this year, and make it a good one!
51. Say yes to help. There will be people who want to help and may offer their support. Take them up on their offers.
52. Ask for help. If people aren't offering, ask. This can be super-hard if it isn't your style, but it is important. Asking others to help with cooking, shopping, or decorating can be a big relief.
53. Have a moment of silence during your holiday prayer or toast in memory of your loved one.
54. Donate a holiday meal to a family in need through a local church, The Salvation Army, or Department of Social Services.
55. **Identify the people who will be able to help and support you during the holidays and identify who may cause you more stress. Try to spend more time with the former group and less with the latter.**
56. Make some quiet time for yourself. The holidays can be hectic, make quiet time for yourself to journal, meditate, listen to music, etc.
57. Practice self-care. I know, how cliché. But it is true – whatever it is that helps you recharge, do it. **You can find some self-care tips here.**
58. Support kids by doing a **memorial grief activity** together.
59. Donate altar flowers or other holiday decorations at your place of worship in memory of your loved one.
60. Prioritize and don't overcommit. When the holidays are filled with so many parties, dinners, and events, save your energy for those that are most important. Look at everything you have to do and rank them in order of importance. Plan for the most important and skip the rest.
61. Make a list and check it twice. Grief makes it harder for us to concentrate and remember things. When you have a lot going on at the holidays, make a list even if you aren't usually a list-maker, and write things on the calendar.
62. Skip it. Really. If you just can't face the holiday it is okay to take a break this year. Before you get to this extreme, consider if you could just simplify your holiday. If you do skip, still make a plan. Decide if you will still see friends or family, go see a new movie, or make another plan.
63. Enjoy yourself! The holidays will be tough, but there will also be love and joy.
64. Remember, it is okay to be happy – this doesn't diminish how much you love and miss the person who isn't there this holiday. Don't feel guilty for the joy you do find this holiday season.



8 Mindfulness Tips During the Holidays

Bring some peace and calm to your holidays

By Marlynn Wei M.D., J.D., *Psychology Today* (Used by permission of the author)

The holiday season can be a stressful time—whether you are dealing with family or mingling at work holiday parties. Try these mindfulness strategies to reduce stress and bring a calm and attentive approach to your holiday this year.

Mindfulness is a way to be open and aware of what is happening in the moment—being present both internally and externally. Mindfulness has been shown to improve relationship satisfaction, reduce stress in relationships, and increase empathy. Mindful practices can also help reduce internal stress and anxiety.

1. **Practice active listening.** It's easy to tune out during holiday dinners and get-togethers, but try being attentive by using active listening. You might be surprised how rewarding and also how much more you will observe and hear. Try to understand the complete message that people are conveying—not just through their words, but also through their actions and body language.
Active listening works best when you minimize distractions, so put away your smartphone, turn off the TV, and turn down the music so that you can hear what people are saying. Acknowledge and encourage people to communicate by giving a simple nod or smile and respond by engaging directly with what they said (you don't have to agree).
2. **Be open to the emotions of others.** By being attentive and receptive to the people around you, you can increase your ability to connect. Observe how people are feeling during the holidays, and be open to communication of those feelings.
3. **Be open to a range of emotions in yourself.** Holidays can bring up a whole host of different emotions—and not all of them happy or celebratory. For many, the holidays can be reminders of loss, grief, or loneliness. You might experience these difficult feelings, especially when loved ones are absent, so allow yourself to make space and acknowledge whatever emotions come up for you rather than try to get rid of them.
4. **Let go of old habits or patterns that might be holding you back.** Holidays come with traditions and memories but, sometimes, old patterns can perpetuate negativity. It's easy to fall into familiar patterns. Perhaps you're annoyed with your in-laws repeating the same story at the dinner table or anxious around a competitive coworker vying for attention. Notice these thoughts and feelings that are happening now, and try to be curious about what is happening, rather than being stuck in thoughts or feelings you might be carrying from the past. This opens the possibility of a new experience in your interactions and can reduce feelings like frustration or boredom for you.
5. **Expand how you communicate care.** The holidays often means gift-giving for many cultures, though there are many other ways of showing that you care. Explore how you show your care by asking yourself questions before buying something: What are you trying to communicate through a gift? Are there additional ways to show that feeling or care, such as spending quality time, expressing how you feel about them directly, or doing something nice and supportive?
6. **Let go of judgment—both for yourself and others.** Conflict with family and friends during the holidays can lead to judgment and self-criticism. Whether you're blaming your partner for not helping you prepare the holiday dinner or feeling disappointed in yourself when looking back at your year, notice when you're making judgments. Take a step back and try to loosen those feelings of being "bad," "wrong," or "inadequate." Even if it's hard to let go of criticism completely, simply notice when it is happening and let those thoughts be without entangling yourself in them to give yourself distance from the feeling.
7. **Balance the "should's" with awareness of your own needs.** Holiday obligations can be important but be sure to balance them with awareness of your own needs. Operating on obligations alone and trying to please everyone's expectations can lead to resentment and burnout. Rather than focus solely on planning the perfect dinner or getting the perfect gift, observe how these expectations affect you. Make sure to take the time and space you need to nourish yourself in the meantime.
8. **Practice self-compassion.** During a busy holiday season, don't forget to take care of yourself and be good to yourself. Get regular sleep and exercise, and take time to do relaxing or fun things so that you can recharge. Taking care of yourself allows you to be able to be more attentive and calmer when you're with others during the holidays. You may even find that when you take care of yourself, it is possible to be kinder and more giving to others—all keeping in the holiday spirit.

De-Escalation Tip of the Day: Focus on Feelings

By Emily Eilers, Crisis Prevention Institute

I was in a hit and run car accident on my way to work this summer. Immediately after it happened, I found myself stuck in the car, and by some wind of providence, a woman appeared in the street at that very moment, pounded on the window to snap me out of my shock, and helped me climb out of the other side of my vehicle.

As we sat on the curb together waiting for help to arrive, I was confused about why I couldn't stop crying. This woman was a total stranger to me, but she instantly put her arms around me as if I were her long-lost sister.

"I'm not hurt, I have car insurance..." I blubbered. "Why can't I stop crying? I feel like my heart is broken! But I know everything is fine!"

"Honey," she said, squeezing me, "I know, I saw it happen. Just let it out."

"Wait, wait, wait. I know what this is," I sniffled, as she wiped the mascara from my cheeks. "At work, they call this **Tension Reduction**."

When a crisis happens, our reactions aren't always logical. Floods of adrenaline or cortisol, physical pain, panic, fear—any number of intense emotions and chemical reactions seize our brains and our bodies. They redirect our rational thoughts into responses that can feel out of control, appear outlandish, or jar us from a more reasonable perspective. But those feelings are REAL, and rational or not, we must feel them and work through them if we want to get to the other side of a crisis. The more I tried to tamp down my tears, the stronger the tidal wave became. Only by letting the feelings work through my system could I move through to the next phase of coping with the situation.

Guess what—it's a lot easier to process those feelings after a crisis if somebody helps you.

My newfound friend in the crosswalk was a living embodiment of another top CPI de-escalation tip: **Focus on feelings**.

Yes, on a logical level, everything was absolutely fine. I was well insured, unhurt, and had loved ones in my life who dropped everything to come meet me at the scene of the accident and help me. But the accident itself stirred up so many primal brain reactions and physical stress responses that I couldn't connect to a rational awareness of the situation in the immediate aftermath.

You don't have to get slammed across an intersection to have a stress reaction that doesn't make sense. Anxiety expresses itself differently in people, and can be triggered by any number of Precipitating Factors. So sometimes, the easiest way to de-escalate a person in distress is to simply acknowledge the fact that what they are feeling, while perhaps irrational to the outside world, is profoundly real to them. Being present, offering support and compassion, and simply reflecting that you hear them and see them—you might find that these simple efforts are all it takes to help a person successfully de-escalate.

My friend and colleague, Aryn Lietzke, wrote a beautiful post last autumn about being on the other side of this experience. She once found herself in a position of giving somebody a safe space to shed their tears. Along with **an excellent list of tips for empathic listening**, she shared the following thought:

"Sometimes, letting someone know the depth of your empathy by being there, by being a sympathetic sounding board for their emotions, is all that's needed for that moment. Rather than worrying over the right words, what if we focused on sharing our time and compassion?"

I know that my life was forever enriched by a stranger taking a few minutes to do just that. Whenever I think of the accident now, I remember less and less the violence of the experience, but the memory of a compassionate presence remains vivid and comforting. I can honestly say that thanks to how somebody helped me de-escalate from my distress, that for me, being in a hit and run was more of a positive experience than a negative one.

Focus on feelings.



crisisprevention.com

CPI's De-Escalation Techniques

*Due to the variety and nature of the work that many City employees do, there are times when employees may find themselves in an uncomfortable situation with a member of the public, or perhaps even another employee, who may be struggling with their mental health, has a cognitive or intellectual status different from our own, sees reality differently than we do, has a medical condition or medication imbalance, or has found themselves in an uncomfortable situation and is expressing themselves very inappropriately or perhaps even aggressively in the workplace. While we recommend calling 911 if anyone feels immediately threatened or unsafe for themselves or someone else due to the words or actions of another person in their work environment, sometimes situations do not rise to the level of contacting law enforcement, or you may find yourself in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or threatened but are unable to distance yourself from the individual making you uncomfortable, confused, afraid, or angry. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is a widely utilized and useful resource that teaches employees and organizations how to de-escalate disruptive and assaultive behavior in safe, non-violent, and respectful way, and they have developed a list of Top Ten De-Escalation Tips which the EAP will be providing to you in this and upcoming newsletter articles. If you have more questions on de-escalation in the workplace, you can confidentially contact the EAP at 266-6561 or you can view upcoming trainings offered by Human Resources on their **training website**.*



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Happy Holidays
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Employees
&
Families

*Thanks for reading,
we hope you found the information useful!*

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