

Holidays may be extra

stressful this year due to anxieties about the economy and what the future may bring. Some may also be facing the holidays without family, friends or co-workers. It may be that we don't have our normal energy level for shopping or entertaining.

Although the season may be challenging, there are ways to beat the stress and have meaningful moments with our loved ones. This brochure provides some practical steps to help reduce stress during this holiday season.

Alexandria Community Services Board

- 24-hour emergency crisis intervention services
- 24-hour detoxification services
- Evaluation and assessment
- Individual, family and group counseling
- Day support and vocational services
- Residential services
- Inpatient services
- Prevention and early intervention services
- Service fees are based on ability to pay or without charge
- Multi-language availability

The Alexandria Community Services Board is a group of 16 citizen volunteers appointed by Alexandria's City Council. The CSB oversees the city's publicly funded services for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse.

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Coping With Holiday Stress



Department of Mental Health,
Mental Retardation and
Substance Abuse



(703) 838-6400
24 hours a day
TDD: (703) 838-5054

www.alexandriava.gov/mhmrsa

Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress

≈ Don't allow your holiday expectations to be determined by magazine pictures or unrealistic television scenes. High expectations cause pressure. Nobody can create the picture-perfect home or family. Do the best you can and know that it is good enough.

≈ Set time aside to think about lost loved ones. Talk about your feelings. Do something to honor their memories such as lighting a candle, sharing stories, singing a song, saying a prayer or eating your loved one's favorite food.

≈ Establish a budget and stick to it. Be realistic about what you can spend on gifts, entertainment, decorations and travel.

≈ When giving gifts, remember that it's the thought that counts. Remind children of this too. Handmade gifts will help you to save as well as carry a special message to friends and relatives.

≈ Surprises are nice, but asking people what they want makes shopping easier.

≈ Ask for help. If you have guests, ask them to bring part of the meal. They will feel good about being able to contribute.

≈ Find time for yourself to relax and reflect on the simple joys of the holidays. When you feel overwhelmed, take a break.

≈ Don't feel obligated to visit everybody. Plan in advance which days, times and meals you will spend with whom. Don't be afraid to say no, or alternate who you visit with each year.

≈ Give yourself permission to decorate less and drop one or two family traditions in order to reduce stress.

≈ Don't drink alcohol or drink in moderation, eat healthy foods and get plenty of exercise and rest so you have energy, feel good and avoid family conflicts. When entertaining, do not encourage or pressure your guests to have "one more" drink.

≈ Don't feel badly if you're not happy. Holiday blues are normal and temporary.

≈ Remember that one reason for the holidays is renewal through sharing love and faith with others.



KIDS & HOLIDAY STRESS

Children often experience stress during the holidays due to household stress, over-excitement or if they have lost loved ones.

Signs of stress in children include:

- Hyperactivity
- Crying and sadness
- Clinging, or fear of strangers
- Worry, nightmares, fear of darkness
- Regression to immature behavior such as bed wetting or thumb sucking.
- Increased shyness or aggression
- Headaches, stomachaches and other pain
- Talking of death or dying

Some ideas on how to help:

- Manage your own stress
- **Maintain normal household routines**
- Talk with children about their feelings at a level they can understand
- **Encourage children to express their feelings through drawings or playing**
- Enforce established rules and consequences
- **Include children in planning a ceremony to remember and honor lost loved ones**
- Teach children about different cultural holidays
- **Involve children in holiday preparation; ask for and include their ideas**
- Spend peaceful individual time with each child, doing quiet activities they enjoy (Try just 10 minutes every other day!)
- **Have your entire family plan and participate in giving (time, money, gifts) to someone less fortunate**
- Give children lots of hugs, love and patience
- **Give yourself lots of love and patience**