

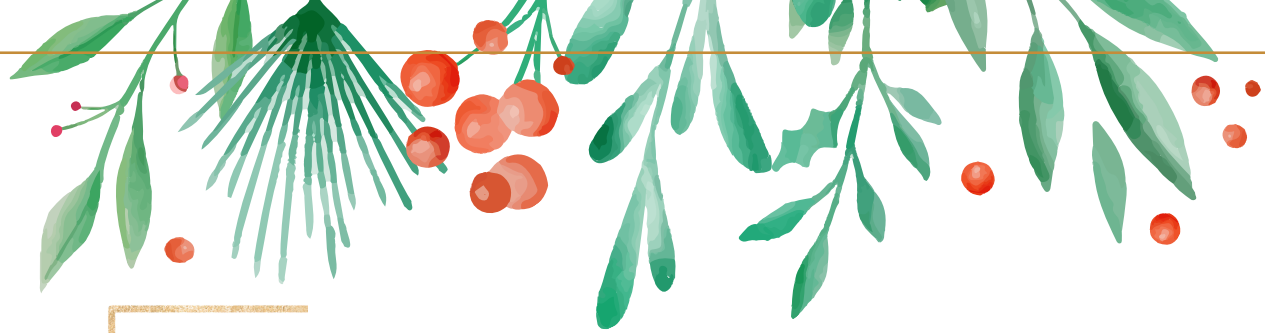


A Holiday Survival Guide

For Families & Caregivers



Institute for
Advancements in
Mental Health



The Busiest Time of the Year

A change in the weather means a change in the festivities. With that being said, the incoming holiday season may be a time of togetherness and wonder with our close family and friends, it can also be a tough time for others as it can cause them to feel distressed and overwhelmed.

The "Holiday Survival Guide" is intended to help families and caregivers navigate the holiday season alongside any associated stressors that may arise, so that all individuals -- families, caregivers, and our loved ones alike -- can continue to thrive after the holiday season.

There are a few signs to look out for, such as...

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Changes in sleep patterns or behaviours
- Decreased or irritable mood
- Difficulty concentrating and/or focusing
- Engaging in old habits, such as using alcohol or substances to cope
- Feeling fatigued, exhausted and/or tired
- Feeling abandoned, isolated and/or lonely
- Intense emotional reactions, such as anger or frustration
- Increased stress, social demands and/or expectations of self
- Loss of interest in enjoyable or pleasurable activities
- Minimal communication and/or lack of communication
- Mild to major depression and/or sadness

This is not an exhaustive list of the signs and symptoms that we should be on the lookout for, but it is a start to building our awareness about our family member and how they're feeling or even, for how we, ourselves, are feeling at this moment in time. This is an important aspect to be aware of, so that we may proactively prevent and react to these sudden changes and in turn, continue to build a life worth living.

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Safe Space

It's important to recognize the role that our environment can have during this time of year and how it can influence our emotions, behaviours, and/or thoughts. As such, it is crucial that we are mindful of the level of stimulation that others can manage.

To better support our family members this holiday season, we can learn to create a safe space, where they can continue to engage in the festivities with minimal stimulation and stress to their overall health and well-being.

You can create a safe space by:

1

Cultivating a Calm Environment

What can we do to create a calm environment? Would this include making simple instead of elaborate decorations, limiting the number of visitors to the household, or changing the kind of music that is listened to?

2

Toning Down Stimulation & Stress

What are the festive elements that we can keep that signify the holidays for us and our family members? What are the festive elements that we can remove that don't illustrate a strong meaning for festivities?

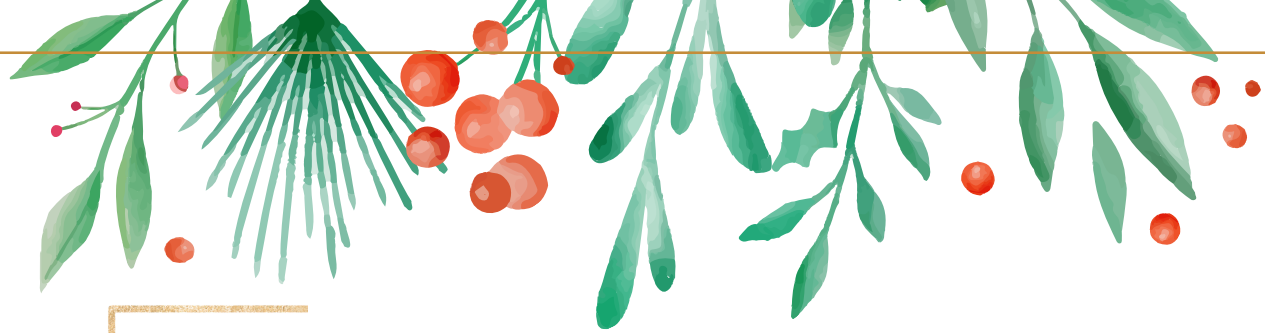
3

Adapting the Holiday Activities

What can you and your family member do in order to make the holidays unique for the circumstances that you're in? How can you and your family member enjoy the holidays? Can you and your family member set up the decorations, make holiday cards, or watch holiday movies together?

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Adapt Holiday Activities & Traditions

In order to cope with the festivities better, we may need to adapt the holiday activities and/or traditions that we engage in. This can be a task that we can complete on our own or we can invite our family members to join in and create something special to do this holiday season.

Examples can include but are not limited to: lighting candles, singing songs, watching holiday-themed movies and volunteering in the community. The opportunities are endless. So, consider what you and your family member would like to do this year, where it has *(a) a sense of meaning, (b) aligns with your family's values, and (c) brings happiness and wonder.*

Who do I want to incorporate in this activity and/or tradition? Is it for myself or is it with others? If it's with others, with whom and why?

What is the meaning or value that I want this activity/tradition to show?

My ideas for a new activity and/or tradition for this holiday season are . . .

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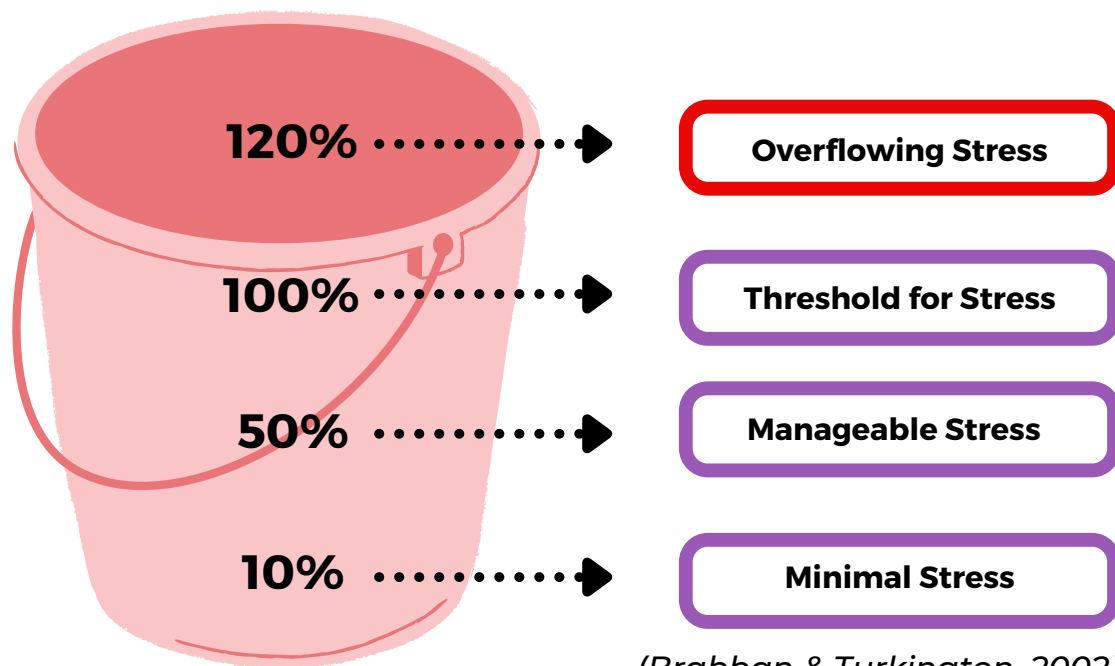
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The Stress Bucket

(Brabban & Turkington, 2002)

The "Stress Bucket" is a model for understanding our stress (Brabban & Turkington, 2002). Imagine each of us has a bucket inside ourselves that collects all of our stress. For example, this can look like our activities of daily living, our work, our home life, our illnesses or finances, that can add stress into the bucket. We all have stress buckets of varying sizes and we're all different in how much stress each of us can manage.

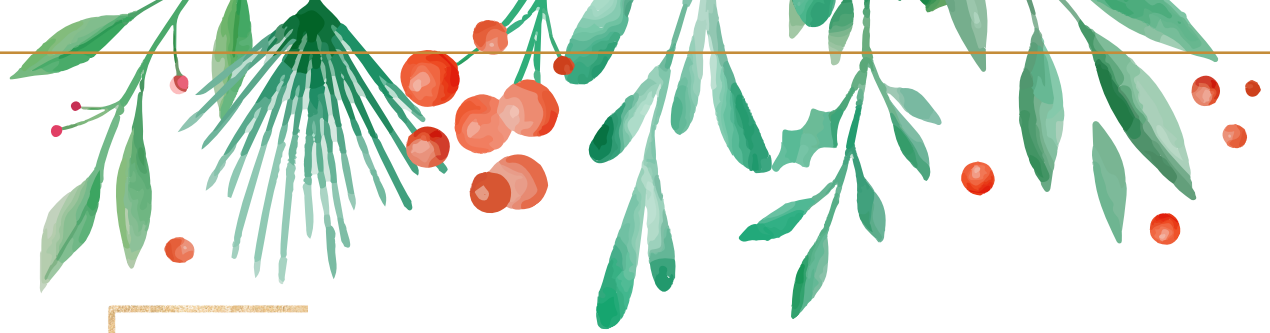


(Brabban & Turkington, 2002)

If you notice yourself overflowing with stress, it can mean that your stress bucket is overflowing. As such, it's important to release some of the stress by engaging in healthy coping strategies. This can look like socializing and connecting with others who understand you and your experience, exercising, meditating, reading, taking a break, or even asking for help.

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The Stress Bucket

(Brabban & Turkington, 2002)

What size and shape is your stress bucket? How full is it?

What are the signs that your stress bucket is becoming too full?

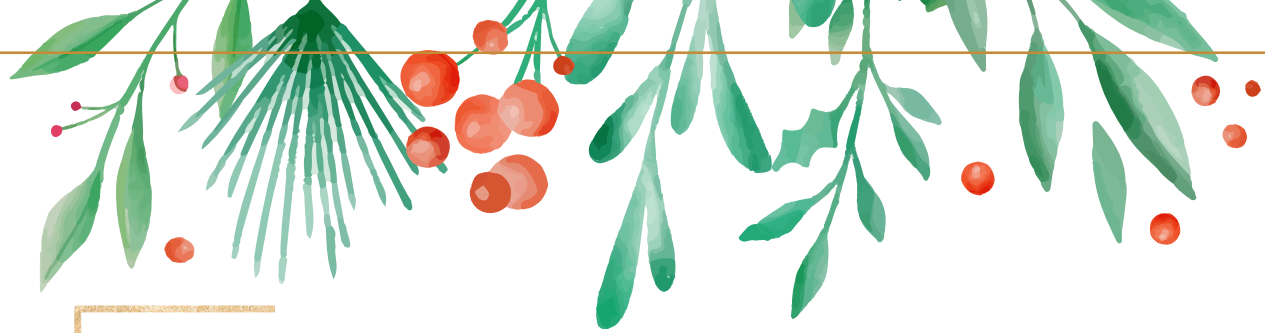
What are the healthy ways that you can engage in to reduce your stress?

What are the unhealthy ways that you engage in to reduce your stress?

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Window of Tolerance

(NICABM, n.d.)

The "Window of Tolerance" is a term developed by Dr. Dan Siegal that outlines our ability to receive information and respond appropriately to the demands of day-to-day life without much difficulty (NICABM, n.d.). The intention is to learn how to EXPAND our Window of Tolerance, so that we can (a) better tolerate sudden changes and distressing situations, (b) increase our sense of safety and security, and (c) manage our overall stress in adaptive and healthy ways (NICABM, n.d.).

However, during times of extreme stress, we may experience traumatic stress responses of either HYPERAROUSAL (fight or flight) or HYPOAROUSAL (freeze) responses, as noted in the diagram below (NICABM, n.d.). In either of these states, we may not be able to receive information or respond effectively, which can lead to feelings of dysregulation and cause us to be OUTSIDE of our Window of Tolerance (NICABM, n.d.). This can lead to feelings of stuckness.

It's important to understand that each and every individual has a different Window of Tolerance. So, be mindful and understanding if you identify as having a narrow window or a wider window of tolerance.

You can manage your window of tolerance by:

1

Recognizing Your Window of Tolerance

Learn to recognize what triggers you, where you are unable to manage your emotions or function effectively in day-to-day life. This can involve identifying times when you are at your best and when you are not at your best. This awareness can help you to manage these states when they appear and remain in our window of tolerance more often.

2

Learning Coping Strategies When Outside Your Window

Learn coping strategies that work for you in order to re-regulate yourself when you recognize that you are outside of your window of tolerance. By engaging in these strategies, you can come back to your window of tolerance a lot faster whilst also expanding the window to further tolerate the challenges that life throws your way.

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Window of Tolerance



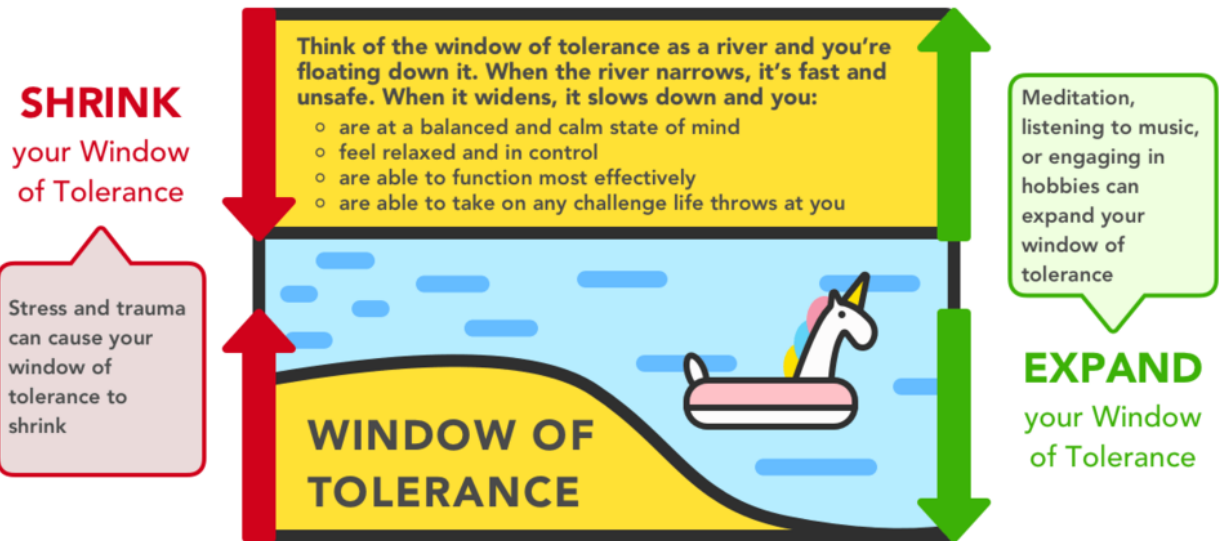
HYPERAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of increased responsiveness
- Feeling anxious, angry and out of control
- You may experience wanting to fight or run away



DYSREGULATION

- When you start to deviate outside your window of tolerance you start to feel agitated, anxious, or angry
- You do not feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet



DYSREGULATION

- You start to feel overwhelmed, your body might start shutting down and you could lose track of time
- You don't feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet



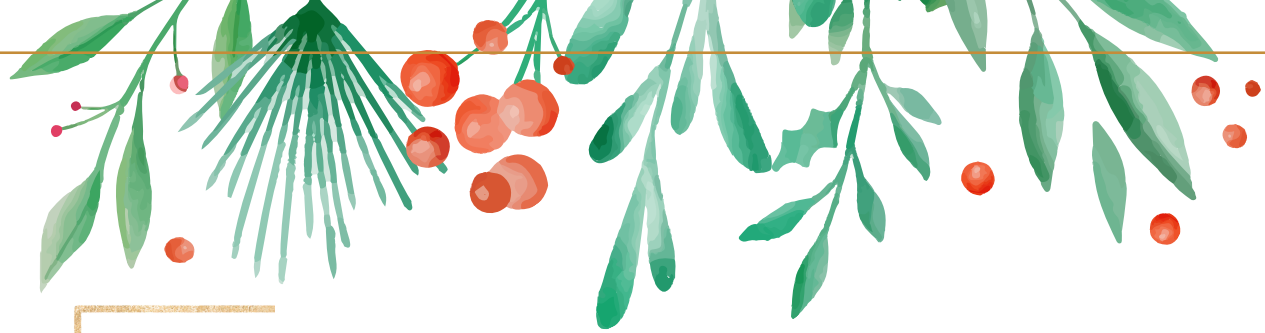
HYPOAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of decreased responsiveness
- Feeling emotional numbness, exhaustion, and depression
- You may experience your body shutting down or freeze

(Banana Tree Log, 2020)

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Catch, Check & Change

(Wright et al., 2008)

"Catch It, Check It & Change It" is a simplified skill from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This is a therapeutic treatment that is based on the idea that our behaviours, emotions, sensations, and thoughts are interconnected, and can cause us to have negative and/or unhelpful responses in relation to our varying approach towards life (Wright et al., 2008).

CBT can help us to create a sense of awareness of the types of thoughts that we have and the kind of cognitive distortions (ie. unhelpful habits) that we may engage in on an everyday basis (Wright et al., 2008). Thus, by learning to change the way that we think, we can recover from the cognitive distortions that are causing us distress and thereby, improve our mental health and mental well-being (Wright et al., 2008).

You can engage in this skill by:

1

Catch It

Notice when you are having negative thoughts. The best method is to use emotions as an 'informational cue'. For example, when you notice you're feeling anxious, check your thoughts. What are you thinking? What kinds of thoughts, images, or memories are causing distress?

2

Check it

Notice thoughts that are causing you distress and learn to evaluate them. Are these thoughts true? What is the evidence for and evidence against that thought? Would other individuals interpret the thought in a similar manner? What are you not noticing about the situation because of the overwhelming emotions you're feeling?

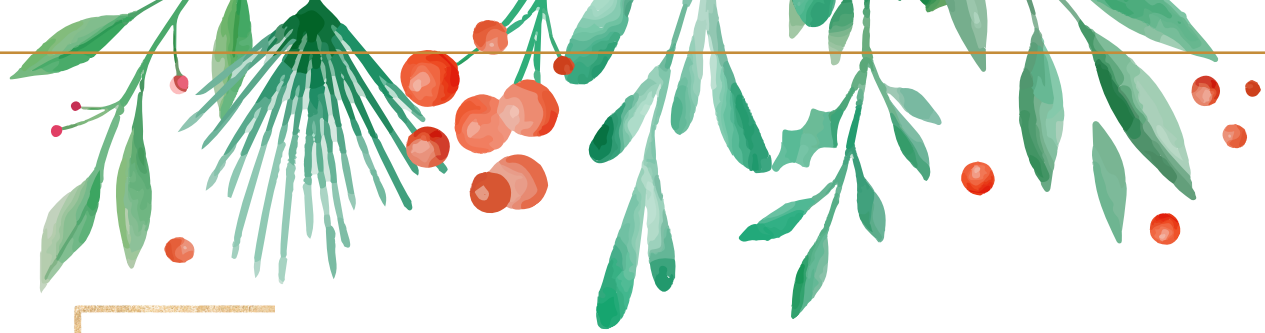
3

Change It ... With Compassion

Take the thought and change it into a thought that is more reasonable, rational, and helpful for you and the situation that you're in. To further this, incorporate a compassionate lens to the thought in order to add a bit of kindness to the situation that you're managing.

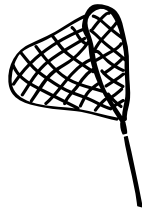
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Catch, Check & Change

(Wright et al., 2008)



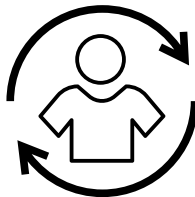
CATCH IT

Learn to catch or notice the distressing thought or belief.



CHECK IT

Learn to check the thought by finding evidence for and against the thought.



CHANGE IT ...

Learn to change that thought or belief to an alternative that is reasonable, rational, and helpful.



... WITH COMPASSION

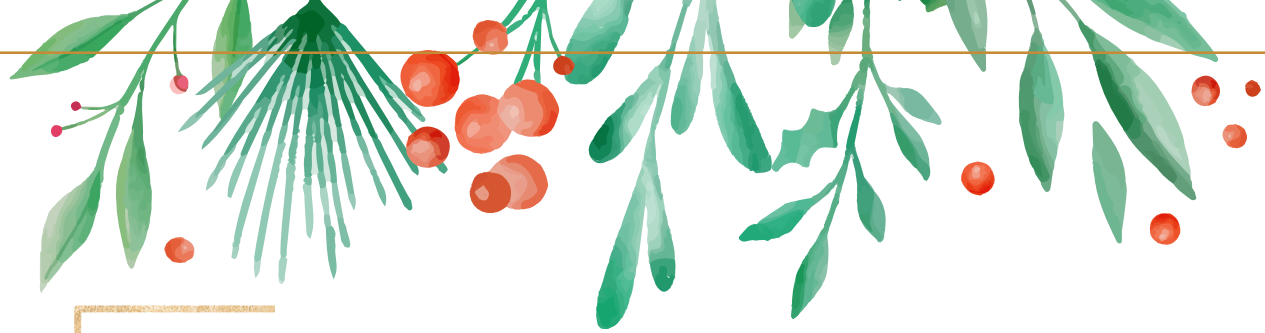
Learn to incorporate the alternative thought or belief through a compassionate lens.

Indifferent Spectator Test:

- What would an objective and impartial individual say about the challenge?
- What would an encouraging friend or partner say about the challenge?
- What am I not saying or not noticing about the challenge?

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Holiday Survival Plan

WHAT ARE THE TRIGGERS?

This can include events, situations, behaviours, thoughts, or emotions that can make us or our family member's vulnerable.

WHAT ARE EARLY WARNING SIGNS?

This can include events, situations, behaviours, thoughts, or emotions that can act as "red flags", indicating challenges ahead.

WHAT ARE SOME COPING STRATEGIES?

Please list skills or strategies that you or your family can use when you would like to cope ahead, cope during, or cope after the event.

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Holiday Survival Plan

WHO CAN WE TURN TO FOR SUPPORT?

Please list who you or your family member may turn to during this holiday season for additional support and how they can help.

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

NAME:

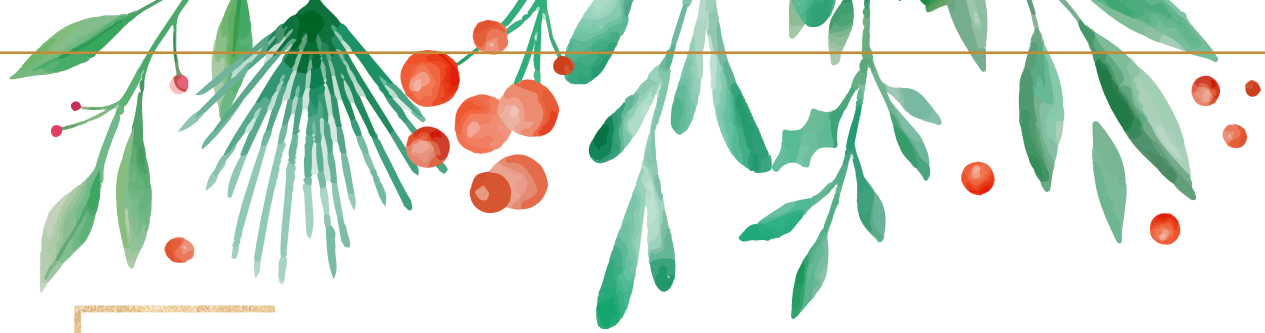
TELEPHONE:

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

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Holiday Survival Plan

WHAT WILL THE HOLIDAYS LOOK LIKE?

How will the holidays be celebrated? For example, will there be a large or small gathering, a big dinner or a small movie night?

WHO IS INVITED TO THE HOLIDAYS?

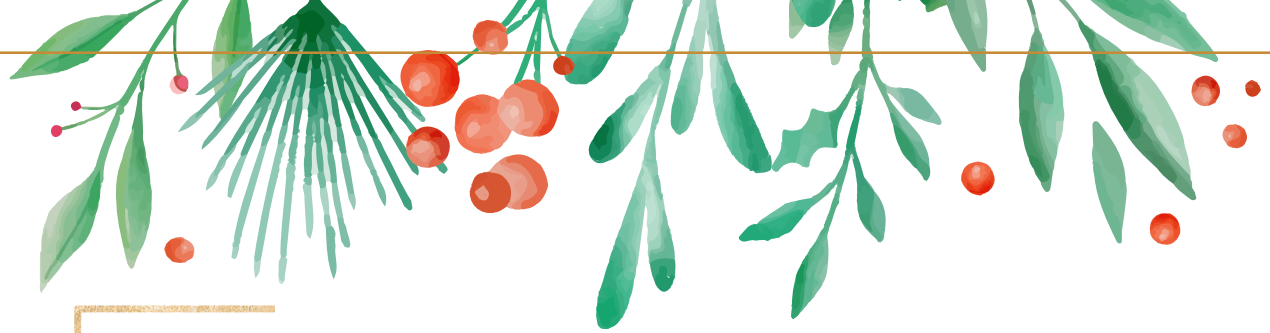
Explore who is invited and why they're invited. Make sure that other family members are alright with the individual coming.

HOW CAN YOU HELP VISITORS PREPARE?

Sometimes, letting visitors know how the holidays will be celebrated and how they can interact with the individual can help.

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Holiday Survival Plan

ACTION PLAN TO SUPPORT FAMILY MEMBER:

Explore a few ways that you can support your family member during the holiday season.

What will be some signs that my family member needs support from me?

What are some steps you can take to help your family member?

What resources are available to support your family member?

What coping strategies and/or tools work best for your family member?

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Holiday Survival Plan

IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS, DO . . .

In case of an emergency, what should be done by yourself or your family member in order to manage this experience?

IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS, DO NOT . . .

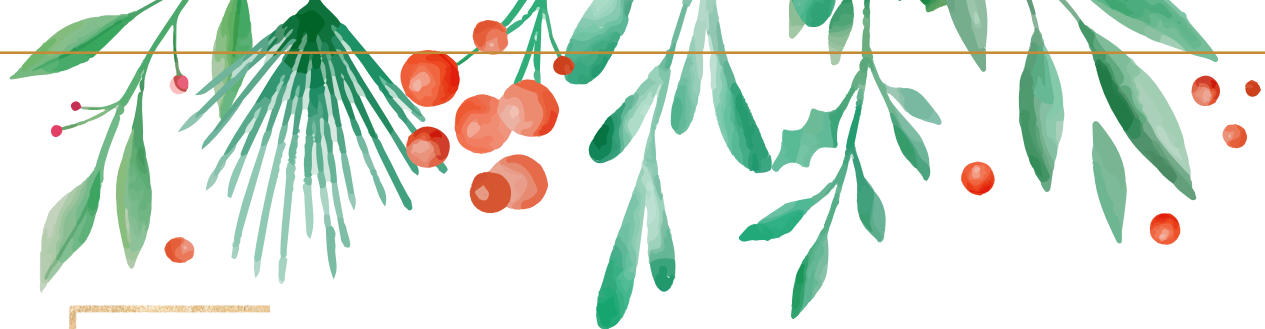
In case of an emergency, what should NOT be allowed to happen during this experience with yourself or your family member?

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF COMPLETING THIS PLAN?

Sometimes, we can forget why we are doing something. That's why, it's important to focus on our goals and why we're doing them.

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Holiday Self-Care Plan

According to Reading (2021), she states that "self-care is health care" (pg. 20). This means that self-care aims to nourish all aspects of your being in order to further nurture your growth and development for your future self (Reading, 2021). For instance, self-care seeks to heal your emotional, mental and physical health.

In reality, self-care takes on a number of different shapes and forms because different things appeal to different individuals. The beauty about self-care is that when we develop this ability to take care of ourselves, it can allow us to transform the way we experience and respond to life. Engaging in self-care can help us to reframe and interpret events more constructively, reduce stress levels, improve our ability to cope, and build on our resiliency and capacity to thrive.

Explore a few self-care acts in the following areas (Reading, 2021):

PHYSICAL

EMOTIONAL

SOCIAL

SPIRITUAL

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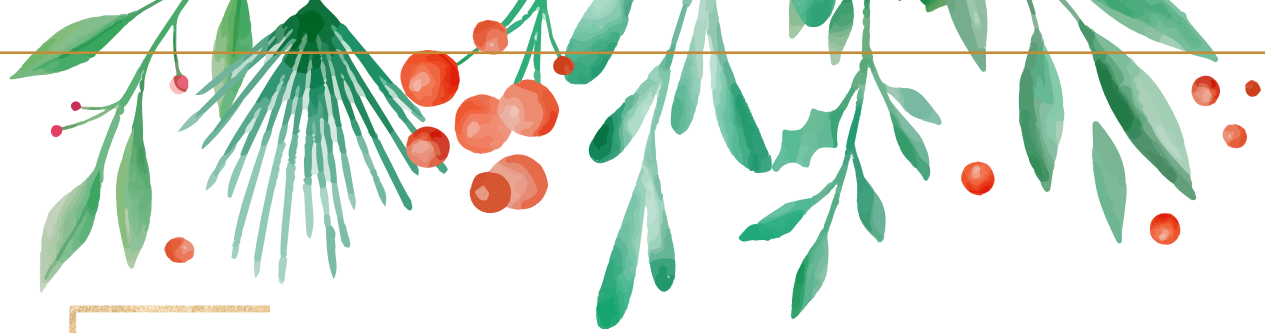


Resources & Supports

- **Institute for Advancements in Mental Health (IAM)**
IAM offers a crisis support line, counselling services, as well as educational workshops and webinars. If interested in learning more, visit <https://iamentalhealth.ca> or call 1-855-449-9949.
- **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)**
Please check what support services are available in your region. The support services vary from region to region. To check, visit <https://cmha.ca/> for further information.
- **Hope + Me - Mood Disorder Association of Ontario (MDAO)**
MDAO offers a number of support services that can include counselling and support groups that are free of charge. If interested, visit <https://mooddisorders.ca/> or call 1-888-486-8236.
- **Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO)**
OCO offers referrals and information regarding various support services near your area of living and has a number of support groups, webinars and counsellors that are available as well. If interested, visit <https://ontariocaregivers.ca/> or call 1-833-416-2273
- **Family Support Toronto (FST)**
FST offers counselling, support groups and workshops catered to the needs of family members and caregivers. If interested, visit <https://familyservicetoronto.org/> or call 416-595-9618.
- **Reconnect (FAME)**
Reconnect offers counselling services and support groups. If interested, visit <https://www.reconnect.on.ca> or call 416-248-2050.
- **If you are in a crisis, call 9-1-1 and ask for a Mobile Crisis Intervention Team to be sent to your area. If this service is unavailable, it would be highly encouraged to go to your nearest emergency room for support.**

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- Brabban, A. & Turkington, D. (2002) *The Search for Meaning: Detecting Congruence between Life Events, Underlying Schema and Psychotic Symptoms*. In A.P. Morrison (Ed) *A Casebook of Cognitive Therapy for Psychosis* (Chapter 5, pg. 59-75). New York: Brunner-Routledge
- National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM). (n.d.) *How to Help Your Clients Understand Their Window of Tolerance [Infographic]*. <https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-how-to-help-your-clients-understand-their-window-of-tolerance/>
- Reading, S. (2021). *Self-Care for Tough Times: How to Heal in Times of Anxiety, Loss, & Change*. Octopus Publishing Group Ltd.
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