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Fact Sheet

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Fact Sheet: Tips for Avoiding Holiday Stress and Depression

The winter season and holidays can be a stressful time for many people. While holidays can bring a smile, it also may bring along thoughts of turmoil, conflict and tension.

According to the Mayo Clinic, holidays often can bring along unwelcome guests – stress and depression. Recognizing common holiday triggers can help disarm them.

- **Relationships.** Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify — especially if family members are thrust together for several days. On the other hand, facing the holidays without a loved one can be tough and leave you feeling lonely and sad.
- **Finances.** Strain on a budget and overspending can mean financial worries after the holidays pass.
- **Physical demands.** Exhaustion can increase stress. Exercise and sleep are two good antidotes for stress and fatigue. Doing too much may also make you more susceptible to colds and flu.

10 Tips for Coping

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** Realize that it's normal to feel sadness during the holidays. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings.
2. **Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
3. **Be realistic.** As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.
4. **Set aside differences.** Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. Try to accept family and friends as they are. Be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try these alternatives: Give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities, and make sure to line up help for party preparations and clean-up.
7. **Learn to say no.** Saying “yes” when you should say “no” may bring more negative feelings, such as being resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand. If it's not possible to say “no,” try to remove something else from your agenda.

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8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Have a healthy snack so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or alcohol. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.
9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spend just 15 minutes alone, take a walk, listen to soothing music, or find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.
10. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

For more information, visit--

- Mayo Clinic – Healthy Lifestyle/Stress Management www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030
- Suicide prevention – 1-877-266-HELP (Alaska CARELINE). Looking for Help? If you are feeling down or are looking for help for yourself or others, please talk to someone www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention
- Alaska Community Mental Health Centers http://www.hss.state.ak.us/suicideprevention/resources_pages_sspc/MHCenters.htm
- National Alliance for Mental Illness – Alaska, (800) 478-4462, <http://www.nami.org/>
- Alcoholics Anonymous –a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other to solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. www.aa.org
- Al Anon and Alateen - 1-888-425-2666. Offering strength and hope for friends and families of problem drinkers. www.al-anon.alateen.org/english.html

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