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A wellness newsletter from your local EFAP.



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## Managing Holiday Season Challenges

The holiday season is typically advertised as a time of festivity and joy. For many people this portrayal is fairly accurate, but for many others the holidays can be a difficult time for a multitude of reasons. Three of the more common challenges are family conflict, depression, and over-indulgence. Below are some ideas about how to manage these issues and make the most of the holidays.

### Family conflict

Have you ever had the experience of interacting with certain family members and suddenly feeling like you're 8 years old again? If so, you're not alone. Early family relationships can be very powerful, and they have a way of pulling family members back into old relationship patterns – and often dysfunctional ones. This is especially common when family members who don't typically see much of each other during the rest of the year suddenly spend a significant amount of time together. Add alcohol to the mix and get Uncle Joe talking about politics, and before you know it a nice after-dinner conversation has exploded like an industrial-sized Christmas cracker. So, how to avoid such an unpleasant situation?

- 1) Be mindful of alcohol consumption. It is no secret that alcohol decreases inhibition and increases impulsivity. Therefore, it is much more likely that someone will say something offensive and/or escalate an argument while under the influence.
- 2) Avoid certain topics of conversation. Politics is a classic conversation minefield, but there may also be other no-go-zones particular to your specific family.
- 3) Manage your emotions. We are all human (yes, even Uncle Joe) and so we are all susceptible to emotional triggers. If this happens to you, simply take a time-out. Leave the room and maybe get some fresh air. You may be surprised at how much a few slow, deep breaths can calm you down and help you face the family once again.

### Depression

When the autumn and winter months hit and the days get shorter and rainier, it is common for many people to feel their mood sag to some degree. For some people, however, their symptoms can be much more severe and may be indicative of seasonal affective disorder (SAD). If you notice a significant and problematic change in your mood that seems to follow the seasons, this might be the case for you. If so, using a "SAD lamp" may help to alleviate some of the symptoms. In addition, talking to a doctor and counsellor could be helpful for finding solutions to this problem.

Another reason that some people experience emotional challenges during the holidays is that it reminds them of unhappy holiday memories from when they were younger. Essentially, this is a conditioned response – our minds create such a strong connection between the holiday season and our emotional memories, that as soon as we hear the

#### Office Locations:

625C 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Campbell River, BC

280B Anderton Road  
Courtenay, BC

Phone 250-287-2266

Toll free 1-866-789-2266

[www.uics.ca](http://www.uics.ca)



## Did you know...

- there have been **over 103** no shows or late cancellations (less than 24 hours) at Upper Island Counselling so far this year? That averages almost 10 per month!

We understand that schedules change and life happens, but if you are unable to make your appointment for any reason, please call with as much notice as possible as there may be someone else waiting for a spot. If it is after hours, leave a message and we will get it first thing in the morning.

- Upper Island Counselling has three counsellors who, from January through November 2018 combined have had 1,495 counselling sessions!
- there are nearly 4,500 employees who are eligible to use Upper Island Counselling's EFAP services. And that number doesn't include their eligible family members!

## Managing Holiday Season Challenges (cont'd)

first note of "Jingle Bells" we get plunged back into that old emotional state. If this is the case for you, it likely indicates that there are old emotional wounds that have not yet healed. Once again, talking to a counsellor can be very helpful. In addition, journaling about our childhood experiences and how they might be connected to current experiences can also be helpful in freeing us from age-old emotional triggers.

### Over-indulgence

This problem can manifest in a variety of ways, but typically shows up in the areas of eating, drinking, and spending, ranging from mild to extreme. On the mild end of the spectrum this might simply result in a stomach ache, a hang-over, or a little less pocket change left over for your morning latte. Maybe not the end of the world, but still probably not ideal. However, on the extreme end of the spectrum, over-indulgence can result in such problems as sickness, broken relationships and serious financial difficulties. Here are three strategies to help you avoid the negative consequences of over-indulgence:

- 1) Set an intention before you begin. This applies to all three of the common pit-falls. Setting an intention can help us stay within reasonable boundaries. For instance, set yourself a one-plate limit before the big dinner, a two-drink limit before the party, and a strict dollar amount before shopping.
- 2) Think of the consequences. Over-indulgence typically stems from impulsivity. We're in the moment, we can anticipate the rush of instant gratification, and we don't think much beyond that. However, it is possible to imagine into the future and anticipate the likely fall-out. Doing so can help us stay on track.
- 3) Ask for help. If you struggle with over-indulgence in a mild way, talk to a trusted friend or family member about it – ideally one who can be with you when you're put to the test. Tell them your intentions and preferences regarding eating, drinking and/or spending. Simply telling someone else can help us feel more accountable for our actions. If your struggle shows up in a more extreme way, seeking formal help is highly recommended. Speaking to a counsellor can be of great benefit, and there are also a variety of support groups that can help with many different compulsive behaviours.

Regardless of what challenges you may commonly experience during the holiday season, it is possible to change these patterns and approach the holidays with a whole new mind-set. Who knows, you might even start looking forward to dinner with Uncle Joe!

By Graham Walker, MA, RCC





## Stress Management Tips for Holiday Happiness & Family Fun

The holidays can be a highly stressful time for many families. It's helpful to prioritize your time, commitments, and activities to reduce stress. Here are some tips and tricks for managing holiday stress, specific to busy parents, that allow for more time with your family.

There's one thing that none of us can buy and that's time. Here are some tips for managing your holiday time for better stress management:

- **Make a list and check it twice.** What causes you the most stress during the holidays? Write them down, along with the level of stress they cause and how they affect you.
- **Take control.** Decide which things on your list you can do something about. Remember that you might not be able to control everything on your list, but you can control how you react to them. For example, instead of getting worked up during holiday traffic, use the time in your car to listen to an audio book or podcast.
- **Unload and learn to say "no."** If there are holiday tasks that you just can't or don't want to do, let them go - cross them off your list if you can. Taking on too much can be more stressful than "passing" on a request in the first place.
- **Work on shedding the holiday "perfection impulse."** Don't expect perfection from yourself or others. For some things, doing an okay job is just fine.

Managing household and family responsibilities are also critical to keeping your stress in check during the holidays. Here are some helpful tips:

- **Prioritize your household chores.** As much as possible, organize your home so you can clean as you go and avoid weekend overhauls that take away from family time. Work with your family members to prioritize and share household chores and tasks.
- **Maintain your children's bedtime routine.** Even during the holidays, keeping the daily bedtime routines like reading together and putting your children to bed at their normal time will ensure they are well rested and give you time to relax or complete a small chore needing to get done.
- **Create a budget and stick to it.** Budget how much you want to spend on gifts, food, and the household during the holidays and stick to that amount. Remember, most times a small gift is enough to show someone you care.
- **Set aside time for yourself.** One of the best things you can do for your family is to take care of yourself - it's important to de-stress yourself during the holidays.

Learning to manage and prioritize your time, commitments, and family activities can reduce stress, allowing you to enjoy your holidays and focus your energies on the things that matter most to you.

- edited for length. See full article here <https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/2013-stress-management-tips-for-holiday-happiness-and-family-fun>



## Online Resources

For more info, tips, and tricks for navigating the holiday season:



<https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/blog/social-anxiety-self-help-strategies-holiday-season>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/parents-holiday.aspx>

<https://ideas.nationalbank.ca/12-money-saving-tips-for-christmas/>

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/2013-stress-management-tips-for-holiday-happiness-and-family-fun>

[https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/sawhna-scafe/tips-for-simpler-christmas\\_b\\_8700314.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/sawhna-scafe/tips-for-simpler-christmas_b_8700314.html)

<https://chopra.com/articles/6-tips-for-mindful-gift-giving>



## A Season for Giving

This year Upper Island Counselling gifted each staff member with funds to, in turn, gift to a local charity of their choice. The following charities were selected by our staff:

The Angel Tree – Campbell River

Campbell River Food Bank

The Salvation Army Kettle Fund – Campbell River

YANA (You Are Not Alone) – Comox

North Island Crisis and Counselling Center Society – Port Hardy



The Staff and  
Board of  
Upper Island  
Counselling  
wish you all  
a Happy  
Holiday  
Season!

## Speaking Your Partner's Love Language Over the Holidays

Author Gary Chapman identifies the following five love languages as the primary ways couples express their love for each other: **words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, gifts, and acts of service.** You and your partner may not value the same love languages, so learning which one (or two) makes your partner feel most loved and then acting accordingly is a great way to give to them this holiday season, and always.

### 1. Words of Affirmation

Verbal expressions of admiration, encouragement, kindness, and love communicate your affection best to a words of affirmation partner. Write a thoughtful note to tell them why you're thankful for them, and be specific! Or write them a holiday card telling them how they've made your life more wonderful this year. At your holiday gatherings, praise them in front of your families. As much as you can, be direct and be personable with your words. If it feels awkward for you, just remember that it's heaven for them.

### 2. Quality Time

If this is your partner's #1 love language, you may have noticed their heart beats a little stronger when you *do* something together. Little adventures and fun activities make them feel bonded to you. Set aside a time to do whatever you know they'd love. When in doubt, ask!

Choose activities that encourage conversation. Think about creating moments to connect when you talk. Make your gift a special moment, consider an activity—a weekend trip or maybe a gift certificate to their favourite restaurant.

### 3. Acts of Service

If you have an acts of service partner, they feel your love best when you do thoughtful and kind things for them. A little favor or helpful act goes a long way. Be especially in-tune to them when things get stressful during the holidays—your acts of service will fill that love tank and fuel the romance. Some ideas include; fix a special dinner, clean their car, take on one of their least favorite errands, offer a back rub—and don't ask them to reciprocate.

### 4. Physical Touch

The nice thing about having a physical touch partner is that showing them love in their preferred way mainly takes awareness—and doesn't take much time or money. When you find ways to physically connect with them throughout the day, they feel secure in your love. This love language can be tricky over the holidays when there are so many other around, so be creative about opportunities to touch. And remember, physical touch isn't just sexual—there are so many other ways to communicate love through touch and affection.

### 5. Receiving Gifts

'Tis the season of gift giving. However, that doesn't mean your partner will automatically feel loved just because they're opening presents. What really matters is the thought behind the gift you give. The gift itself is an expression of love, a tangible "I love you and was thinking of you."

Give when it's not expected. Get creative during the busy season, and it doesn't have to be expensive. When it comes to the actual Christmas gift, start planning now. Put real thought and love into picking just the thing. Make it unique—show them that you put effort into showing love through a gift.

One of the best things about learning to speak your partner's love language is that you learn the value of putting them first.

Sources: Laura Trigg's article, *The Best Ways to Tap Into the 5 Love Languages Before the Holiday Crazy*

<https://www.5lovelanguages.com/>