

“Be still and know that I am God”

Psalm 46:10

Holiday Stress and Mental Health

Hard to believe that the holiday season approaches! For some, if not all of us, the stress and anxiety levels generally increase during these days. That’s especially true for those with mental health challenges and their families.



Below are some practical tips for reducing stress and anxiety. However, these tips should always be used as the outflow of our connection to our God who loves us and calls us to love one another. For it is in the stillness of hearts that we can experience the quiet joy of God’s love. This psalm verse, “Be still and know that I am God” is a good mantra for us to mediate on during the upcoming holiday season. For it is in the quiet stillness of our prayer that we sense the profound presence of God. Out of that stillness comes the peace and calm that helps us manage the stresses of our daily lives.

Consider the Gospel story where Jesus, crossing the lake with the apostles, was asleep on a cushion in the stern. A huge storm arose and the frightened disciples woke Him and asked, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” The frantic question may mirror our own calling upon Jesus to answer our prayers! Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. The passage tells us that Jesus is ready to respond to us in our need. It is in our prayer that we call upon God to calm the storms in our life and it is in our prayer that we are able to find the peace that that surpasses understanding! As Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:7) “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Let us ask God to help us manage the anxiety and stress in our lives. Here are some tools suggested by NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, that are applicable to all of us.

Adapted from “Tips to manage stress and anxiety levels during the holidays.” By NAMI

Plan ahead:

Many people tend to have a better time if they are part of the planning process.

- Discuss holiday plans in advance. Acknowledge the needs of all family members, preferences, and limits to create a workable situation. Let your feelings be known and don’t make assumptions.
- Help your loved ones figure out how to handle some of the stress (i.e. how to answer tough family questions during family time, a task to focus on during gatherings, how long to stay, places to go to take breaks, and so forth).



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Know and respect your limits:

It's ok to say no.

- Set boundaries around the time you spend on holiday tasks. An afternoon shopping at a couple stores is more manageable than a full day at the mall.
- You need not attend every event you are invited to. Some people are emotionally draining to be around. It's ok to protect yourself by declining their invite. A brief call or text to express your "apologies" and wish them a happy holiday season offers limited engagement and an easy exit.



Avoid known triggers

For some, the holidays are a time of painful reminders.

- If you find yourself triggered by certain activities or interactions, try to replace them with emotionally fulfilling ones. If certain holiday movies remind you of sad times or lost friends, don't watch them.
- If a problematic person for you is going to a holiday event, do you really need to attend? If you do, don't actively engage with that person. Consider dropping by for a brief check-in rather than attending the full event.

Be extra giving to yourself

Don't forget to appreciate yourself.

- Amid holiday shopping and gift giving, perhaps you can buy or make a present for future you — maybe something that will support your mental health or encourage a new and healthy hobby.



Prioritize quiet time with God

Gift yourself quiet time for reflection and prayer.

- Use a candle, cross or picture to create a special holy space just for you to connect with Jesus.

Remember the reason for the season

Consider posting a little note on the fridge or mirror.

- Thanksgiving Day - Have an "attitude of gratitude" for the gifts God has given you
- Christmas – God broke into the world and showed us mercy and compassion
- New Years – life is filled with new beginnings, a time to look forward in Hope.

Wishing you and your families God's blessings for the holiday season.

Archdiocese Commission on Mental Illness <http://miministry.org>

If you or someone you love is looking for help during the holiday season, please contact:

- The Suicide Crisis Helpline: 988
- Crisis Text line- text "HOME to 741741
- The NAMI HelpLine -950-800-1NAMI (6264), text "HelpLine" to [62640](https://www.nami.org/Help-Resources/Text-Text-988)
- Friendship Line- 24 Hour Hotline/Warmline: 1 800-971-0016



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