

Mental Health Minute

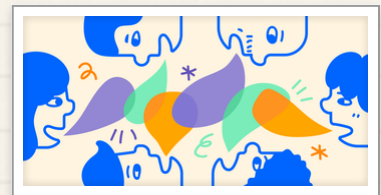
Associated Clinic of Psychology

Navigating the Holidays

It's already November (!), and I am sure many of you are starting to gear up for the holiday season. While the holidays are a time that we normally look forward to with excitement and anticipation, this year has placed some additional challenges on our shoulders. Longstanding traditions may be changing with respect to COVID-19 and the new state guidelines related to gatherings, leading to worry, disappointment, and sadness. In order to approach this time of year with resilience, here are a few tools to help students and families cope.

Communication and Problem-Solving

This one may seem obvious, but it's essential! Gather the family together, and consider the following:



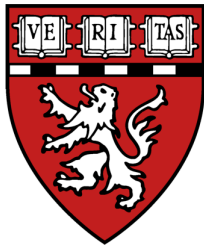
- Make a ranked list of what have been essential components of holidays, past and present, for your family.
- Plan out the who, what, where, and how of your traditions. Consult with everyone involved to have a shared understanding of how the holidays may look this year, the differences to expect, and how all can safely celebrate.
- Problem-solve together and get creative on how you might retain your most important family traditions - a grandparent could join you for a lesson over Zoom on how to make that favorite dish for the holiday meal, or that elusive sibling might be willing to take a virtual seat at the table this year!

Gratitude

Gratitude is an essential skill that students and families may find helpful to practice both individually and together this year. Gratitude takes many forms, so if you've been someone who has said, "That doesn't work for me," consider the following tips, as well as a link to more information below.



- **Find a method that works for you!** It goes without saying that we are all unique in what coping strategies work for us, so that means we all have different ways of practicing and experiencing gratitude. Consider the following examples: journaling, taking a mental inventory to consider the people and experiences for whom you are grateful, a gratitude walk (using our five senses to appreciate our environment and our body), writing a letter or note of gratitude, verbally recognizing someone's role in your life, and meditation. This list isn't exhaustive, and the article link below can offer more tips, provide examples, and describe the benefits of gratitude.
- **Use gratitude to connect!** Expressing gratitude with those around us naturally improves our relationships. Making this a regular practice creates a felt sense of care that is essential to family and marital functioning.
- **Think of gratitude as a *skill*.** Don't give in to the temptation to give up on gratitude after a one-off experience; allow yourself to work through the discomfort of both expressing and receiving gratitude. It may be uncomfortable, but it doesn't mean that it isn't appreciated.



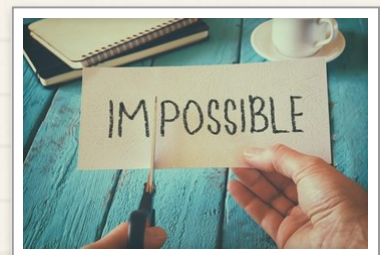
Giving thanks can make you hap...

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November kicks off the holiday season with high expectations for a cozy and festive time of year. However, for many this time of year is tinged with sadness,...

Learned Optimism

Similar to gratitude, learned optimism is a process of challenging pessimistic thoughts in order to develop more positive, helpful thoughts and behaviors. The core idea here is to shift our interpretation of the world to develop a more meaningful and helpful reflection on our lives. Consider the following:



- **Limit cognitive distortions.** Our thoughts are powerful, but sometimes these thoughts might be irrational or unhealthy. Examples and counter-examples of such thoughts may include: *personalization* (seeing oneself as at fault rather than interpreting failure as a learning experience, such as "*I'm so careless for ruining this holiday dish!*" vs. "*I learned how to be a better cook despite my recipe not turning out the way I wanted.*"), *pervasiveness* (assuming negative patterns of events, such as, "*Other events this year have been disappointing, so Thanksgiving will be more of the same.*" vs. "*This is an opportunity for me to apply what I've learned in the pandemic to have a meaningful Thanksgiving.*"), and *permanence* (assuming negative traits about ourselves, such as, "*I don't have ideas for the holidays; I'm just not creative.*" vs. "*I acknowledge I am under a lot of stress, so I'll turn to others for support on creative ideas.*").

- **Take a different perspective.** Consider the example of our overall topic, navigating the holidays. We may think in a pessimistic way, "*It won't be like last year, so it just won't be the same.*" To practice learned optimism, we might consider what can be learned about the situation and ourselves, how we might grow, and what perspective this could give us. Example: "*This year will be different, but it will be an opportunity to get in touch with what is important to me and practice creative ways to be close to the people I care about.*"
- Take a look at the link below. It contains further reading, exercises, and videos to better understand learned optimism and its benefits.



Learned Optimism: Is Martin Seli...

positivepsychology.com

Want a more joyful outlook in life? We discuss the Learned Optimism concept and its benefits, as well as how you can start to change your mindset and life.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

It typically takes a few weeks of adjustment before kids are used to their new routines and schedules. If you notice significant changes in your child's behavior, such as sleep problems, major appetite changes, behavior or mood changes, or anxiety that makes it difficult for them to function, seek out support and consultation.

Associated Clinic of Psychology is here to provide mental health services to students and their families. Consult with your child's school counselor or contact us directly with questions. www.acp-mn.com or 612-455-8643

** This newsletter was created by Travis Nelsen, LMFT, School Lead*

