Accessing Mental Health Support During the Holiday Season

A presentation delivered to you on behalf of Carelon Behavioral Health

The Holidays Bring Joy…

- Social gatherings with family & friends
- Giving & receiving holiday presents
- School-age children off from school
- Cultural celebrations:
  - Food & drink
  - Religious observances & traditions
  - Decorations & music

What is your favorite part of the holiday season? Why?



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..&The Holidays Can Bring Stress

Scheduling family gatherings, logistics, and cost of travel and lodging

Securing childcare when schools close

Financial stress of additional holiday expenses - dipping into savings or accumulating debt

Overindulging during holidays (weight gain, excessive drinking)

Finding the time to balance work, home, social, and extended family expectations

What aspects of the holiday season cause you the most stress? Why?

When the Holidays Feel More Complicated

- Family Acceptance and Belonging: The holidays can bring unexpected grief, stress, or tension for individuals who may feel less accepted or understood by family or community.
- Isolation and Disconnection: People who may have limited family connections, or who feel different or excluded, may experience loneliness during a season centered on togetherness.
- Cultural and Identity Pressures: In some families or cultural contexts, there may be hesitation or concern about discussing or seeking mental health support, leading individuals to stay silent.



These experiences remind us why understanding and compassion matter so much — and why breaking stigma around mental health is essential.

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Breaking the Stigma on Mental Health

Stigma refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, or stereotypes that cause people to view someone differently because of a particular characteristic, condition, or circumstance.

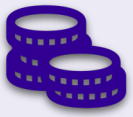
- Many people experience stigma, shame, or misunderstanding when it comes to discussing mental health concerns.
- Seeking help is a sign of strength — not weakness. Accessing support takes courage and fosters healing.
- Faith, spirituality, and community can provide comfort and connection, and they can complement — not replace — professional care.

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Impact of Stigma on Access to Care

Lack of cultural understanding, bias, and unequal access can affect anyone seeking mental health support.



Structural factors such as income, access to healthcare, or social acceptance influence how easily people can get care.



Inclusive, culturally competent care helps everyone feel seen and supported.

Breaking down stigma opens the door to healing. Once we acknowledge those barriers, we can begin focusing on compassion, connection, and care.

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How to Reduce Stigma – The Three R's

Recognize	• We must first recognize and acknowledge the high prevalence of mental health and substance use conditions. • Understanding how common these challenges are helps normalize the conversation and reduce shame.
Reeducate	• We need to reeducate ourselves, friends, and family on the realities of mental health and addiction. • This means addressing misconceptions and misinformation with empathy, facts, and open dialogue.
Reduce	• The goal of the national Stamp Out Stigma program is to change perceptions and reduce shame. • We can all play a part by encouraging honest conversations, sharing experiences, and supporting individuals in seeking help when needed.

Reducing stigma creates space for healing and understanding. Now, let's explore some ways to nurture our emotional wellbeing throughout the holiday season.

Emotional Wellbeing Through the Holidays

- Acknowledge your feelings. It's okay to not feel okay — give yourself permission to feel and heal.
- Stay connected. Spend time with supportive people — family, friends, or your chosen community. Consider joining a support group.
- Find small joys and be kind to yourself. Give yourself grace if you need extra rest or space this season.
- Seek professional support. Don't let stigma or shame prevent you from reaching out for help.

"The only mistake you can make is not asking for help." - Sandeep Jauhar

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Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress or Grief During Holidays

- Take care of yourself:
  - Meditate or practice deep breathing
  - Eat healthy, move regularly, and get enough sleep
  - Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco, and substance use.
- Limit media overload. Step away from news or social media when it feels overwhelming.
- Set boundaries and simplify. Say no when needed and focus on what feels manageable.
- Honor loved ones. Light a candle, share memories, or volunteer in their memory.

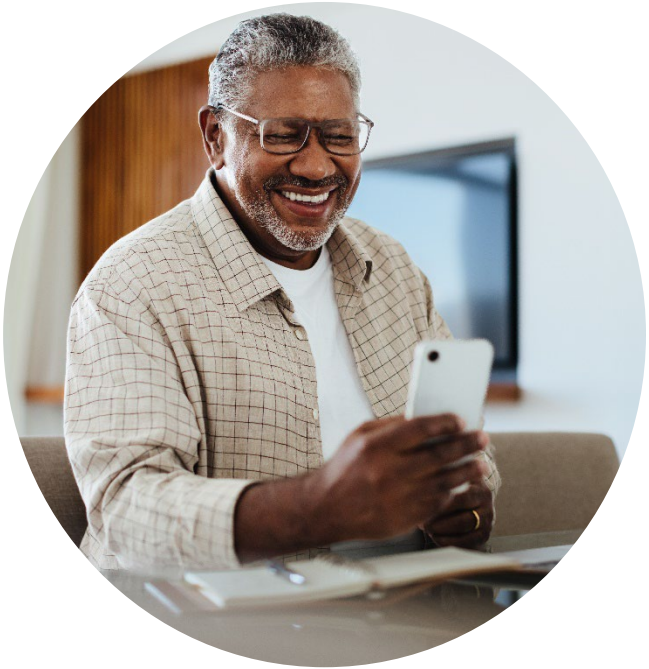


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Why Accessing EAP is Important

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to help with any issues that impact your life or ability to perform your job.

- Your EAP is a free, confidential service that provides help for personal and work-related issues through a team of licensed mental health professionals and work/life specialists.
- Eligible employees and their household members are eligible for EAP services.
- EAP representatives are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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EAP Emotional Well-Being Resources

Callers are provided referrals to licensed mental health professionals either immediately on their call or by email if preferred.

- No cost for EAP counseling sessions
- Private and confidential
- In-person, virtual, and telephonic sessions
- Digital resources available
    - EX: Let's Talk Depression - a multi-resource toolkit



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Additional Resources

- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Inclusive Therapists
- Association of Black Psychologists Directory
- LGBTQ Psychotherapists of Color Directory
- National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network
- Psychology Today Directory of African American Therapists

What the EAP Can Help You With

- Managing depression, anxiety, stress, grief, and loss
- Planning for significant life events such as marriage or the birth of a child
- Strengthening relationships
- Achieving personal and professional goals
- Getting addiction assessment and treatment recommendations
- Balancing work/life issues
- Planning for a strong financial future
- Sorting through legal matters

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Contact Your EAP

*Confirm available EAP benefits with your district's benefits department.

- Many school district benefit administrators offer confidential EAP services for employees and household members.
- Services may include counseling, stress and resilience support, referrals, and phone or virtual access.
- Benefit limits and available services vary by plan.



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Evaluation

Thank you!

