

Four tips on how to manage holiday stressors with Dr. Angela Stowe

December 20 2018, by Yvonne Taunton

With the holidays quickly approaching, many are beginning to feel the inevitable stressors of the expected "cheerful" holiday season. Between hosting family, gift swaps with friends and the ongoing list of holiday parties, it can all become extremely overwhelming if not properly managed.

"Stress in and of itself is not a bad thing," said Angela Stowe, Ph.D., director of Student Counseling Services and Wellness Promotion at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "It often motivates us and is an indicator of something that is usually important to us. When stress starts to negatively impact your activities, then it's probably time to step back and reflect on what's going on and consider making adjustments."

Enjoy this [holiday](#) season without the additional stressors by following these best practices:

Plan ahead when budgeting: One of the primary factors in experiencing holiday stress is dealing with financial overextension. Maybe you are used to purchasing extravagant gifts for all of your family and friends, but are unable to afford it this year. Instead of conjuring [feelings of guilt](#), think outside the box by getting creative or helping others in different ways that are not necessarily an out-of-pocket expense.

Remember you have the authority to say "No": Being tasked with a long holiday to-do list can apply unwanted pressure. Cooking the entire family dinner, making sure home décor is social-media-worthy and

finding the perfect holiday party outfit are all examples of contributions to this holiday season's stressors. If you cannot add any more to your plate, remember you can always say no. It might be uncomfortable at first, but your space and well-being are more important.

"We talk a lot about self-care these days," Stowe said. "Self-care is doing the things that help take care of yourself, such as taking a walk or spending time with friends. The more challenging aspect of self-care involve knowing what not to do, knowing when it's time to say 'no.' Saying 'no' to a few things also gives you more opportunity to say 'yes' to the things that are most important to you."

Acknowledge your feelings in dealing with grief: Loss is difficult during the holidays. The feelings of loneliness and being without someone can definitely cause [negative effects](#) and alter the dynamic of your traditional holiday normal. Acknowledge your feelings by seeking counseling or reaching out to trusted loved ones for emotional support.

According to Stowe, honoring your grief and the loss of loved ones is painful and healing at the same time.

If you are interested in talking to a counselor, UAB Student Counseling Services is available for students and the Employee Assistance and Counseling Center is available to faculty and staff for additional support.

Accept the situations you cannot control: In a perfect world, everything will go the way you expect; however, that is not always the case. Avoid holiday disappointment by being realistic in knowing that you cannot worry about the things you cannot change. Be more understanding by not placing high expectations on yourself and those around you.

"Be gentle with yourself and others during this busy [holiday season](#),"

Stowe said. "Steal some moments in your day to pause, reflect and ask yourself what is important (and also not as important) to you that day so you can stay focused on being able to have more control and management over your holiday stress."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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