

acaciaEAP  
employee assistance program

# HOLIDAY HANDBOOK



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01 HOLIDAY SEASON
  - 02 MANAGING MONEY
  - 03 PRACTICING KINDNESS
  - 04 LONELINESS
  - 05 RESILIENCE
- 



THE JOY OF  
BRIGHTENING  
OTHER LIVES  
BECOMES FOR US  
THE MAGIC OF  
THE HOLIDAYS

W.C. JONES



---

# HOLIDAY SEASON



## TIPS AND TRICKS TO GET YOU THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Despite the usual depictions of the festive season, the holidays can be a very stressful time of year. This end of year might mean complex social interactions with family or relatives who you might not want to see. There may be expectations, or at least perceived expectations, for the 'perfect celebration', complete with the perfect gift and perhaps the most important meal of the year.

### **Plan Ahead**

List what you need and get it sorted early. This might include shopping, food, decorations, or even travel arrangements. Make it as detailed as possible, so you can prioritise. What can be done now? What's essential?

Allow plenty of time; tasks often take a third longer than we think they will! Do not overestimate how much you can achieve the day or night before.

Delegate certain tasks to other family members to reduce your workload.

Keep your list for next year; it'll need updating, but it will give you a good starting point.

Know when to stop! Decide when to stop preparations and when to start relaxing and enjoying the holidays. Try to stick to this goal, even if it is in the late afternoon or the night before. Remember the holidays are for you to enjoy too.

### **Shopping**

Set a budget and stick to it. Consider starting a holiday season savings account early and contribute small amounts regularly. Avoid using credit cards or Buy Now, Pay Later systems, as they make it easy to forget how much you've bought and can cause you to spend more than you think. Shop online – it can save time and money.

Ask your friends and family if gifts are necessary. You may be surprised to learn others are relieved at not having to buy gifts too.

---

# HOLIDAY SEASON

## TIPS AND TRICKS TO GET YOU THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

### **On the Day**

#### Keep Calm

Do relaxing activities to reduce your stress. Play relaxing music, take a bath to unwind, or walk the dog.

#### Seating

If you have strained relationships with anyone coming to dinner, avoid sitting opposite them. Invite a few more people along if possible, as it can help dilute any stress caused by challenging relatives or guests.

#### Avoid Caffeine

When we are stressed, our bodies produce cortisol to prepare ourselves for 'fight or flight' situations. Caffeine does too. Decaffeinated coffee and tea or herbal tea alternatives can help keep the stress levels down.

#### Breathe

When we're stressed, our heartbeat increases and our breathing shallows. Work on reversing this process by taking deep, mindful breaths.

#### Set a Home Time

It is a good idea to have a pre-planned home time, so you do not feel pressured to remain in an environment longer than you are comfortable.

#### Get Moving

The holidays are, for many, a time of excessive eating and drinking, and exercise can be easily overlooked.

Exercise is also a great way to reduce stress; it burns off 'fight or flight' hormones and helps produce mood-enhancing endorphins. Try going for a walk after dinner as the fresh air and exercise will lift your mood and make you feel better.

#### Manage Alcohol

Most holiday articles will tell you to avoid alcohol altogether, but let's be realistic. Try to avoid excessive alcohol as it dehydrates your body and makes your liver work overtime. It is also a depressant; while it may help you feel relaxed now, it will dip your mood shortly after.



# MANAGING MONEY

---

## SET LIMITS & PLAN AHEAD

Make lists of the things you need to buy and the amount you wish to spend, and try to stick to it. Having lists of what presents, decorations, and food you need to purchase can help you plan your spending and keep you on track. Maintain a running total of costs to help keep an eye on spending.

Talk to others about their wants and needs. While it can feel good buying gifts for others, some people may want a service, such as help in their garden, or a donation on their behalf.

Plan for the year. Buying gifts in the sales throughout the year or using a lay-by service can help you spread the budget. Travel and accommodation prices can dramatically increase towards the holidays, so book ahead if possible.



## SAVE MONEY

Finding online discounts, offers, and deals for your gifts will not only save time, but also can be cheaper. Look for online sales or organisations that offer sign up deals. Saving any rewards points for the holidays, if you have them, can be a good plan too.

## FIND CLARITY & SUPPORT

Understand the expectations and needs of your loved ones. It can help you know where to set spending limits. Having an open conversation is a way of working towards this.

Counselling can help you set goals, work with boundaries, and talk about the stress that can come with holiday spending. If you are stressed, you may not be in a good frame of mind to plan, organise, or negotiate.

We have specialist clinicians available to support you in getting the most out of your holiday time. We also have Financial Coaches that can help with budgeting and planning.



NO ACT OF  
KINDNESS, NO  
MATTER HOW  
SMALL, IS EVER  
WASTED



AESOP



# PRACTICING KINDNESS



Many people feel they don't have the time or the money to carry out self-care during the holiday season; however, research has discovered an easy, free, and effective stress management technique that most of us already practice – simply, the Act of Kindness.

---

The Australian Kindness Movement defines an Act of Kindness as a spontaneous gesture of goodwill towards someone or something.

With the 'festive spirit' encouraging an attitude of generosity and care for others, kindness and the holidays are often seen as one and the same; however, research has found practicing kindness can significantly reduce your stress levels, both physically and mentally benefiting yourself and others around you.

Multiple studies have discovered that being kind to others not only makes the recipient feel good, but it can actually improve the giver's stress levels, mental health, emotional wellbeing, and physical health. In addition, acts of kindness are infectious in communities and can result in a 'kindness chain reaction'.

Neurobiological studies have found that, when a human being performs an act of kindness, the brain produces the neurochemicals known as the 'Happiness Trifecta': Oxytocin, Dopamine, and Serotonin. These neurochemicals send happiness boosts around our body.

Not only does it feel good, the release of these hormones balances your serotonin levels, lowers your blood pressure and cortisol levels, and blocks pain signals to the brain. This can improve cardiac health, circulation, and digestive health, decrease symptoms of depression and stress, and even increase life expectancy!



# PRACTICING KINDNESS



The many benefits of practicing kindness can be summarised into three categories: physical benefits, psychological benefits, and social benefits.

---

## 01 PHYSICAL BENEFITS

In addition to increased life expectancy, acts of kindness can strengthen your immune system, improve cognitive performance, increase your energy levels, and lower your heart rate.

## 02 PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Studies have found acts of kindness can decrease feelings of loneliness, depression, and helplessness, build a sense of calm and relaxation, improve your vitality, and help you manage depression and anxiety. In addition, it can help you create a 'kindness bank' of memories that can be used to boost self-esteem and increase resilience levels in your future.

## 03 SOCIAL BENEFITS

Acts of kindness also have positive impacts on others. Recipients of kindness often feel happy, valued, and loved. This can lead to them following suit and practicing acts of kindness to others in return. Acts can also improve your social relationships, increase your sense of connection, as well as contribute to the creation of positive communities.

# PRACTICING KINDNESS

We have provided 12 Acts of Kindness ideas to help get you started on your kindness journey.

---

- Hold a door open for someone: holding the door open is a simple way to help someone feel treated
- Leave post-it notes with positive messages: whether for your roommates or your family members, leave short messages to help brighten their mood
- Say thank you: let someone close to you know how much you appreciate them by sending them a text message or writing them a letter
- Donate clothes, toys, or non-perishable food items: purchase some extra food or have your child pick out a toy and donate it to a charity, such as the Smith Family or the Kmart Wishing Tree
- Smile at a stranger on the street: help cheer up a passer-byer by giving them a smile
- Give up your seat on the bus: make someone's commute a little easier by offering them your seat
- Help out a neighbour: acts like offering to pick up groceries can make a huge difference
- Reduce the road rage: let a fellow driver merge into your lane to help them on their way
- Go visit someone in hospital: the holidays can be a lonely time for people in hospital. Contact your local hospitals to see how you can bring some festive spirit
- Clean up your local area: pick up trash at the park or playground to help give back to your local community
- Become a mentor: mentoring allows you to support your peers by sharing knowledge, experience, and emotional support. See if your work has a mentoring program you can sign up for or look online
- Volunteer: many charities are in desperate need of volunteers during the holidays. Get involved with activities such as gift wrapping, making deliveries, preparing food, fundraising, or sorting donated items.



# LONELINESS

---

The holiday season is generally promoted as a time of connection with loved ones, including family and friends. For many people though, this time creates feelings of sadness. They may be away from the loved ones, either by choice or by situation. They may feel anxious about the social commitments that come with the festive season. They may just have feelings of loneliness in the midst of celebrating.

For those who feel this sense of loneliness, holidays can be a time of additional stress. This can be even more noticeable on particular days, such as Christmas Day and New Year's Eve. While it is difficult to have these feelings on these days, it is normal to feel this way.

Although some feelings of loneliness may still hang around, taking care of yourself can help you to generally feel better and enjoy your time to yourself.



You might like to:

- Finally finish that good book
- Try the new local café
- Plan to complete a personal project
- Discover a new hobby

You can then track your progress each day. Noticing that you are spending your time doing things which boost your positivity or just are fun, will be helpful in taking your thoughts away from feeling lonely.

To make the holiday season a little easier, here are five tips that can help with potential loneliness.

## 01 CONNECT

Chat with others in the same situation. Talk to your friends and family, either online or in-person. Participate in local holiday activities, get to know your neighbours, or even join a new community group.

## 02 REFLECT

Reflect on your thoughts. Loneliness is a feeling, not a fact or a reality. Accept that this feeling will pass, and move forward.

## 03 GRATITUDE

Doing a gratitude journal each day can be a good way to help you remember what you do have in your life and what is important to you. Start by naming just a few things you are thankful for; this can help you shift your mindset to positive things in the future.

## 04 CONTRIBUTE

Check out how you can contribute to your community. Helping others can be a good way to feel the true spirit of the holiday season.

## 05 SUPPORT

We have EAP professionals available 24/7 to help you better manage your feelings of loneliness.

A young green plant with a single leaf growing out of a crack in dry, cracked earth. The plant is vibrant green and has a fuzzy texture. The background is a grey, cracked surface, possibly sand or dry soil, with deep, dark cracks. The text is overlaid in white, serif font.

RESILIENCE IS  
NOT ABOUT  
OVERCOMING,  
BUT BECOMING

SHERRI MANDELL

---

# RESILIENCE



For many of us, the holidays can be a time of joy, excitement, family connection, and love and kindness; however, despite the joys that the festive season can bring, it can be a notoriously difficult time for people.

Whether it's financial pressures, family dynamics, increased alcohol and food consumption, or reminders of lost loved ones, the festive season can lead to increased stress levels. Left unchecked, this stress can negatively impact our mental and physical health.

You can protect your health and wellbeing during the holidays by boosting your resilience. Studies have shown that resilience-building is highly effective in reducing the impacts of stress and protecting general mental health. Knowing what resilience is and how to build it can help you beat this festive season.

## **What is Resilience?**

Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, stress, threats, or tragedy. If a person is resilient, it doesn't mean they are immune to experiencing difficult things, or that they aren't affected by the difficulties they face. Being resilient means that even when things go wrong, or even if you're struggling with the impacts of something, you can overcome it.

Being resilient is often human beings' natural state, with many of us bouncing from difficult events without any external help; however, for those that struggle with resilience, you are not without hope. We are able to build our resilience through life experiences and training. It is a skill that can constantly be practiced and improved upon.

---

# RESILIENCE

## What are the Benefits of Resilience?

Coping with stress in a positive and resilient way have many tangible and wide ranging benefits. High levels of resilience have been linked to:

- Improved learning and academic achievement
- Lower absences from work or study due to sickness
- Higher levels of success
- Reduced use of risk-taking behaviours, e.g., excessive drinking and drug-taking
- Greater life satisfaction
- Longer life expectancy.

On the other hand, the lack of resilience can lead to chronic stress. Chronic stress is associated with high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, heartburn, heart disease, and digestive issues. A lack of resilience can also affect your mental health, and lead to insomnia, anxiety, and depression.



## Resilience-Building Tips

Based on the benefits of increasing your resilience, here are our top 10 tips on how to boost your resilience and reap the benefits:

### Invest in your Physical Health

A key way to build resilience is to invest in your physical health, through a healthy and balanced diet and regular exercise. Try scheduling regular exercise throughout this month and tracking your food intake in a diary.

### Make Time to Relax

Modern life can be fast-paced and hectic. Even when relaxing, people often are multitasking, e.g., watching TV while scrolling on their phone. Regular relaxation allows our bodies and minds to reset. Try scheduling regular relaxation activities, such as taking a bath, listening to music, reading, yoga, or swimming.

### Good Quality Sleep

Getting enough sleep is essential in managing stress. Ensure you get between 7 to 9 hours per night. Try getting up at the same time each day, and reducing your caffeine intake, especially in the afternoon.

### Have Things to Look Forward to

Life can start to feel monotonous if we don't have things to get excited about in the future. Try booking a holiday, giving yourself regular treats at the end of the week, or arranging fun things to do on your days off.

### Meditate

Practicing a meditation technique can counter stress by eliciting the relaxation response in our central nervous system. Meditation also enables us to detach from our stressful thoughts and feelings and make decisions more effectively. Try yoga, tai chi, meditation apps such as Headspace, or guided imagery.

---

# RESILIENCE



## Create a Good Social Support Network

Humans are naturally social beings. Therefore, it is vital for our wellbeing and stress management that we feel supported and have people around us that care for us. Try arranging a regular catch up with your friends and family, signing up to a fitness or activity class with a co-worker, or calling your loved ones after a particularly difficult day.

## Reframe your Situation

Sometimes we can get stuck in one perspective which can be focused in the negative. Focusing on alternative perspectives can improve our mood and energy levels. Try considering alternative perspectives to your predicament. For example, instead of thinking about the gift you cannot purchase for your loved one due to money difficulties, focus on other ways you can express your love.

## Express your Emotions

Allowing space to regularly express our emotions ensures they don't overwhelm us, and, instead, provides us with emotional awareness and control. Try journaling regularly, talking to friends and family about how you feel, using art to creatively express our emotions, or going to counselling.

## Laugh More

Laughing can significantly reduce stress hormones, boost the immune system, and improve general resilience. Even smiling can support stress management. Try smiling and laughing more, watching comedies, or reading a funny book.

## Get Support

Resilience can be built through effective counselling and psychological therapy. Therapy can provide you the space to explore what is stopping you from battling stress and inhibiting your ability to be resilient. Try calling your EAP to arrange a counselling session.



## CONTACT US

CALL 1300 364 273  
SMS 0401 33 77 11

[www.acaciaconnection.com](http://www.acaciaconnection.com)  
[info@acaciaconnection.com](mailto:info@acaciaconnection.com)

