



reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

Dealing With Holiday Challenges

With Thanksgiving around the corner and Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa not far behind, the holidays are on a lot of people's minds. Some look forward to the holidays, but for others, the holidays can be difficult. Family conflict, isolation from loved ones, religious and cultural factors (e.g., recognizing the colonialist history of Thanksgiving, political or religious differences with family members), and temptations around substance use are a few of the reasons that people may struggle this time of year.

In dealing with any difficult holiday situation, it's important to exercise good self-care: Get rest, eat well, and get some exercise. Self-care also includes saying "no" to things and setting boundaries. Following are some additional tips for making your holidays happier and healthier.

Family Problems

If you are a part of a dysfunctional family or your family doesn't accept your sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious or political views, holiday visits can be difficult. One way to deal with problematic

family situations is to avoid visits. If that isn't an option, consider ways to get extra support during time with relatives. Schedule a call or Skype session with a friend or "family of choice" member and connect with supportive people through social media. Bring a friend with you to provide a "buffer" and put family on their best behavior. Participate in events with your community that provide support and togetherness.

If you will be in a challenging family situation, try to plan some time

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All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!

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alone or out of the house to get a break from the people and situations that cause you stress. Make a date to see friends, go for a walk, see a movie by yourself, or say you need time to study in your room or at a library. Take a long bath or say you have a headache and need to take a nap.

Managing Holiday Loneliness

For those who can't travel home, the holidays can be lonely. Seeing other people celebrating can make it seem like you're the only one who feels alone. It's healthy to acknowledge rather than deny your feelings. But, it's also important to recognize that your perceptions about "everyone else" having a great holiday are probably not accurate. You are certainly not the only one whose holidays are not what they seem that they "should" be.

Try to plan something fun for yourself to do—go on that hike or play that video game you were putting off because you were too busy. Create a new holiday ritual for yourself or with others who are staying in the area. It's also a great time to volunteer: Research shows that doing for others not only helps them, it can help you to feel good, too.

Religion and Culture

It can be difficult knowing what to do and how to feel around the holidays when religious, cultural, and social justice issues are pre-

sent. Some students have different views, beliefs, and values than their families or than mainstream society, which can raise questions about how much or little one wants to be involved with family or societal holiday traditions.

One important thing to keep in mind is that each person can choose how and whether to celebrate a particular holiday. This may mean finding new people and communities with which to get



Create your own holiday traditions. Photo from UC Regents. All rights reserved.

involved for celebration, ceremony, activism, or volunteering.

Preventing Relapse

The holidays can bring temptations and triggers for people in recovery from or struggling with substance use problems. Holiday parties can make it tempting to slide into a lapse in sobriety or overdo it, or feeling lonely and isolated can make it tempting to try and cope by drinking or using other drugs.

It's important to be realistic about what tempts or triggers you: Plan ahead to avoid putting yourself in

tempting situations or to minimize the risks of participating in them. For example, if going to a party will tempt you to drink, consider making an alternative plan—go to dinner or a movie instead, or throw a sober party with other friends who won't be indulging. You could also try to minimize temptation at a party by staying for just a short time or taking a friend who can support you in your sobriety or moderation. If others offering you drinks or

pressuring you to drink is a problem, practice saying "no thanks," or keep a cup of water or soda in your hand to discourage people from giving you drinks.

If you are in recovery, research meetings that are available over the holidays—especially if you are traveling and won't be able to go to your usual meetings. Keep in touch with your sponsor or other supportive people.

Final Thoughts

Try to let go of any "shoulds" you are holding about the holidays. Although it may not be easy, you can work on changing how you view the holiday season. Take this opportunity to build gratitude for the good things you do have and to recognize things to celebrate in your life. These could be "big," like good health, the opportunity to be in college, or getting a job, or "small," such as a beautiful sunset, a text from a friend, or a smile from an acquaintance. This could be the year to create new meanings and new traditions if the holidays have not been happy for you in the past.

Dear CAPS,

As a college student, I don't have the time or money for "self-care!"

—*Busy and Broke*

Everyone is talking about "self-care." While the idea of taking care of oneself is great, the concept can add more stress if it feels like one more task to add to your "to-do" list or you associate it with luxuries like weekly massages. It's helpful to think about self-care as figuring out what your stressors, limits, and needs are and doing what you can to try and address them.

Sometimes self-care means saying "no." There are times to turn down

that leadership role in a student org or tell your friend "I have to think about that" instead of automatically saying "yes" when they ask you for a big favor. Being realistic about your time and energy is an important part of self-care.

Self-care also means taking care of the basics: sleep, diet, and exercise. Sure, many people struggle with one or more of these, and no one is perfect. But, there is always room for small changes. Take a look at your lifestyle and see if there are things you'd like to tweak. It's helpful to set a long-term goal (e.g., "eat better," "get more sleep," "find more ways to relax") and then come

up with some small and achievable steps toward meeting it. For instance, if you want to work out more, set weekly goals (e.g., run on Tuesday and Thursday for 20 minutes) that move you toward where you want to be in a few months, then build on them. Also, look at barriers that stand in the way of change. Once you see what makes it hard to move forward, you can work around these challenges.

Self-care isn't about being getting it all right all the time, and it's not about luxuries and "extras." It's about finding what works for you and taking small steps to get there! *See below for some specific self-care tips for activists!*

1 Find the activism that works best for you

There is more than one way of standing up for what is right. Protesting, calling representatives, writing articles, sharing your story, donating money, fundraising, organizing events on campus, educating family and friends — these are all valid methods. Be aware of situational and personal limitations. Do crowds or public speaking give you anxiety? What resources do you already have to work with? Which communities need the most attention at this time?

2 Pause

It's easy to put off taking action out of nervousness or fear. But on the other hand, the activist guilt can be real. Be honest with yourself if you are too physically or mentally exhausted to take it to the streets. Have you been only getting a couple of hours of sleep each night? Struck by an illness? Close to a panic attack? Failing your classes? Aim to participate in the next advocacy event or demonstration, but remember you're allowed to say, "No."

3 Disconnect from social media

Constantly updating news reports of unjust violence or hate crimes can be discouraging and even dehumanizing. Some situations are just not worth your energy — we're all familiar with the hateful Facebook commenter who refuses to listen. Disconnect from social media if you need to. Remember that you have the freedom to place your energies into whatever actions you choose. Remind allies that you are not bound to educate them on information that is easily available online or through other resources.

SELF-CARE TIPS FOR ACTIVISTS

4 Stick to a schedule

Direct action requires us to be alert and ready for unexpected events. But that doesn't mean you should continually sacrifice on necessities that keep you healthy and sane. Keep eating, sleeping and staying active. Keep seeing a therapist if that's part of your regular schedule. Be aware of activities that you can afford to skip or reschedule, like missing a few simple reading assignments or weekend social events.

5 Stay open to learning new things

Accept that you are unable to know everything about an issue. Don't be embarrassed if you haven't heard about a current event, vocabulary term or theory. Take it as an opportunity to learn something new. You don't always have to be the one educating others on a topic. Listen to those who identify as women or as LGBTQ. Raise up the voices of Muslims, people of color and people who are disabled.

6 Reach out to friends

One of the best forms of therapy is talking with friends. For activists, turn to those who you know have the same concerns on their mind. Think about your friends who you don't have to explain everything to or take on the role of an educator with. They are part of your support group. Even listening to others with their personal struggles can give you a wider perspective and lighten your own mental load. Supporting fellow activists is a form of resistance in itself.

Information compiled by Isabel Ngo; Graphic by Xian Wong

Upcoming Events

See our [website calendar](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more upcoming events.

MOVIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH: Movies for Mental Health (M4MH) is a free interactive workshop for UCSC students that focuses on empowering young adults, educators, health professionals, and community members to gain a better understanding of mental health within their environment. There will be dinner, short films, and a discussion on Wednesday, November 15, 2017, from 5 to 7 pm in the Mural Room in the Student Health Center, first floor. Free fee to contact CAPS at (831) 459-2628 for more information.

ANXIETY TOOLBOX: This is a three-part workshop series that provides research-proven tools to help you better understand and cope with anxiety. Each of the three hour-long workshops provides info and experiential skills. There are still openings in several series for fall quarter, and more series will be offered in winter quarter. Read more on our [website](#), and call us to get more info and sign up at (831) 459-2628.

MINDFUL LIVING: This is a three-part workshop series that uses mindfulness-based tools to increase insight and self-awareness and build coping. The skills learned

apply to a range of issues, including managing stress and difficult emotions. Each of the three hour-long workshops provides info and experiential skills. Series are full for fall quarter but will be offered again in winter quarter. Read more on our [website](#), or call us to get more info and sign up at (831) 459-2628.

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS offers a different wellness workshop every Wednesday, 3 to 4 pm, at the Student Health Center Mural Room. These hour-long workshops provide info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thought patterns, how positive psychology relates to academic success, and improving academic focus. Read more on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

LET'S TALK: Let's Talk is a drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential, one-time chat with a professional CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! Let's Talk is held four afternoons a week at different, convenient locations around campus. All registered undergraduate and graduate UCSC students are welcome to any location of Let's Talk. Read more and see the current schedule on our [website](#).

CAPS Welcomes a New Staff Member

CAPS is happy to welcome a new staff member, Polina Apilado, Psy.D. Polina is a psychologist with a multicultural focus. Polina has worked at several other college counseling centers with students with a wide variety of concerns. Welcome, Polina!



Polina Apilado, Psy.D.