



reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services
University of California, Santa Cruz

The Power of Animals to Reduce Stress

The University Library just held its annual Pause for Paws event, which brings therapy dogs to campus to give students a study break petting pooches. Therapy dog events have become common at colleges across the country because of the benefits they bring—and they are just fun!

Time with animals can be a great stress reducer: Research has suggested that interacting with them can increase oxytocin (a brain chemical related to bonding) and dopamine (a brain chemical related to happiness) while lowering cortisol (a steroid hor-

mone released by the adrenal glands during stress). Petting an animal can lower feelings of stress and blood pressure and improve feelings of wellbeing.

However, since pets other than service and support animals aren't allowed on campus, how can a stressed student get some animal time? If you live off campus, maybe your landlord allows pets. However, if you live on campus or have a rental that does not permit animals, here are some other ways you can reap the rewards of time with furry (or feathered or

scaly) friends.

1. Attend a dog therapy event. Pause for Paws is generally held every quarter just before finals.
2. Plan Skype dates with family to see your pet back home.
3. Volunteer at an animal shelter.
4. Start a dog-walking or pet-sitting service.
5. Visit a dog park and make friends with one of the pooch owners.
6. Watch cute animal videos. There are a million to choose from!

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All About CAPS

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

- Helpful workshops and trainings around campus
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services (in person Mon-Fri 8 am-5 pm; 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](#)!



Upcoming Events

LET'S TALK: Let's Talk, a drop-in service where you can have a brief, confidential chat with a CAPS counselor, continues in winter quarter. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! In fall quarter, Let's Talk was held 2:00 to 4:00 pm on Tuesdays at the Cantu Center and 12:30 to 2:30 pm on Wednesdays at the Graduate Student Commons (across from the Bay Tree Building). These days and times will likely continue in winter quarter, and new days and times may be added. All registered undergraduate and graduate students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. Read more about it and find out the latest schedule on the CAPS [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page or call CAPS at 831-459-2628.

WELLNESS SERIES: CAPS launched a new wellness workshop series in fall 2015 and plans to continue it in winter. These weekly hour-long events are designed to give you helpful info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include self-compassion, mindfulness, healthy thought patterns, and how positive psychology relates to academic success. Check our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page or call CAPS at 831-459-2628 for the latest info.

STRESS LESS WORKSHOPS: CAPS launched a new workshop series in fall 2015, led by our peer educators, and plans to continue it in winter. Each 90-minute workshop provides valuable tips on stress management and includes an interactive and fun relaxation exercise. No sign-up required—just come to the CAPS central office. Check our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page or call CAPS at 831-459-2628 for the latest info.

Dear CAPS,

Sometimes I feel like I don't belong in college, like I am "less than" everyone else here. Is this unusual?

—Faking It



What you are describing has a name—"imposter syndrome." Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you are presenting a "false self," that you don't measure up or are not really what you seem. It can also refer to feeling that you are not

as smart, "together," or capable as those around you. Along with this, it's common to have fears that others will "find you out" and see your true (and "faulty" self).

As a therapist, I hear from students all the time who feel this way. It can be especially prevalent in first-generation students, who may not have family mentors and role models to help them prepare for and acclimate to college, thus making them second-guess whether they measure up to other students. It's also common among graduate students, as the expectations of grad school are higher than those of undergraduate programs. However, anyone can feel like an imposter. In fact, experts have found that even people who have achieved a lot, won awards, and been praised for their work may feel like they are faking it.

So, how can you combat imposter syndrome? One way is to remember

that you're not the only one who feels this way. It's also helpful to recognize that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Learn to accept that you can't be great at everything, and recognize when you need help. Although it can be tough for some people to admit they need help, asking for guidance when you are struggling is a sign of strength and is good self-care.

What else can you do? One thing that helps is to "go public" about your feelings. Talk to friends, family, or mentors. Keeping your feelings to yourself and ruminating on them will just make it worse. You will probably find that when you open up to others, you'll learn that they have fears and insecurities, too.

If imposter syndrome is having a negative impact on your ability to function, seek help from an advisor, Learning Support Services, the Disability Resource Center, or CAPS.

How to Make the Holidays Happier

Whereas for some, the holidays bring relaxation, fun, and enjoyable family visits, for others, they are stressful. Still others may have a mix of good and bad.

There are a number of factors that can make the holidays tough. Family conflict and dysfunction; isolation from family and friends; and temptations around substance abuse or addiction are a few common ones.

In dealing with any stressful holiday situation, it's important to exercise good self-care: Try to get enough rest, eat well, and get some exercise. Here are some additional tips for making your holidays happier and healthier.

Dealing With Family Problems

If you are a part of a dysfunctional family, holidays visits can be stressful. It can also be difficult to be home if you are queer and your family does not accept your sexual orientation or gender identity.

Plan ahead to get some extra emotional support if you will be visiting family. Schedule a time to call or Skype with a friend or "family of choice" member and connect with supportive people through social media.

You may also consider bringing a friend with you—sometimes having someone else along can provide a "buffer" and put family on their best behavior. It can also give you someone to talk to when you need a break from time with relatives.

Try to plan some time alone and/or out of the house. Make a date to see friends, go for a walk, go see a movie by yourself, tell family you need to spend some time studying

or napping in your room, or make any other plans that will give you a break from challenging people and stressful situations.

Another way to manage family problems is to make alternative holiday plans. Maybe a visit to a friend's home, a solo road trip, or staying in Santa Cruz would be a better alternative to visiting family. Or, you might consider minimizing the time spent at home rather than spending the entire break there.

Managing Holiday Loneliness

When you don't want to or can't make it home (for example, due to time or money issues), the holidays can be lonely. And, constant reminders of "holiday festivity" can make it feel harder to deal with and make it seem like you are the only one who feels alone.

There are several things that are important to keep in mind when trying to manage holiday loneliness. One is that it's OK to feel lonely or sad—acknowledge your feelings. But, it's also important to recognize that your perceptions about

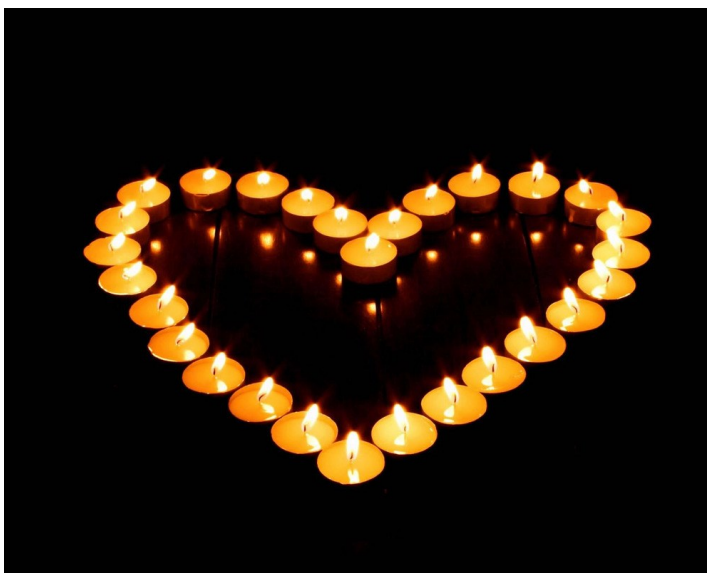
"everyone else" having a great holiday are probably not accurate. You are certainly not the only one feeling down.

One way to cope with holiday blues is to take the opportunity to plan something fun for yourself—go on that hike you've been putting off because you were too busy or take the time for that novel or new video game you were saving for after finals. Make plans with others who are not going to spend the break with family. It's also a great time to look into volunteering. Research shows that doing for others not only helps them, it can help you to feel good, too.

Preventing Relapse

The holidays can bring temptations and triggers for people in recovery from or struggling with substance use problems. There are parties, celebrations, and other situations in which substances may be prevalent. The festive atmosphere can make it tempting to slide into a lapse in sobriety or to overdo it. Conversely, if you are feeling lonely and isolat-

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ed, it may be tempting to try to cope by drinking or using other drugs.

Because of these potential challenges, it's important to think ahead and be realistic about what tempts or triggers you: If you know you may be in a difficult situation, figure out ahead of time whether you can or should avoid it or can minimize the risks in participating in it. For example, if going to that big New Year's Eve party is going to make it very likely you will drink when you are trying to remain sober, consider making an alternative plan—go to dinner or a movie instead. Throw a sober party with other friends who won't be indulging. Or, take a friend to the party with you who can help you stick to your plan. Decide ahead of time to only stay for 90 minutes. Make sure you have a nonalcoholic drink in your hand so

that others aren't pressuring you to take an alcoholic drink. It's also wise to plan on bolstering healthy coping skills and self-care during the holidays.

If you are in recovery, research meetings that are available over the holidays—especially if you are traveling and won't have access to your usual meetings. Sometimes there are special and/or extended meetings during the holiday season to provide additional support. If you have a sponsor, stay in touch if needed. And, if you don't have a sponsor, figure out which friends, mentors, or family members would be helpful to contact if you need a pep talk or advice to avoid problems over the holidays.

Final Thoughts

No matter what the reason might be

Contact CAPS:

Student Health Center
East Wing, 2nd Floor
Phone: 831-459-2628
(24/7 crisis help)
<http://caps.ucsc.edu>

for holiday challenges, remember that there are ways to boost your coping tools. Figure out what works for you. Try to let go of any “shoulds” you are holding about holiday expectations. Although it may not be easy, you can look at this holiday season as a chance to reinvent what it could be for you. Take this opportunity to do what you need to for yourself. CAPS wishes you a happy and healthy winter break.

