

## MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS

Holidays can be stressful for many as feelings of loneliness, pessimism and unreasonable expectations creep into one's mind. What should be thought of as a time of appreciation, sharing and gratitude can easily be turned into a time of anxiety and isolation if thought processes go unchecked.

Below is a list of management techniques and thinking tips that may help manage the stresses of holiday seasons.

- **SET PRIORITIES** of the things you need to take care of first. Sobriety comes first, then personal health and wellness, then everything else. Keep it straight during the holidays.
- **HAVE FUN** and stop taking things so seriously. It is amazing how a little thing like shifting the way we perceive other's actions can make a difference in our own spirit. Try observing people for amusement instead of getting upset at inconsiderate or unacceptable behaviors.
- **CONTROL YOUR EXPECTATIONS** and keep them based in reality. Although it is the holidays, life still happens.
- **BE PRESENT** and stay in the moment. Enjoy your surroundings while they last. Holidays only happen a few times a year, so shift your mind to the present and celebrate the people and places in your life.
- **PLAN YOUR ACTIVITIES** ahead of time. Plan sober fun during the holidays and surround yourself with true friends and loving family. While planning, know your time limits and excuse yourself before stress levels increase too much. A little planning and foresights can virtually eliminate stresses caused by family gatherings.
- **GRIEVE** if you need to. Many people become very sad and depressed over the loss of loved ones during the holidays. Share your loss with someone close to you and also share the good times you had.
- **REACH OUT** and host your own celebration with the friends and family that you want around you. Do not feel like you must attend a gathering that you know will cause anxiety for you. Simply create your own party and set start times and stop times on the invitations.

- **TRY SOMETHING NEW** during the holidays. There are usually special events, attractions, festivals and sports activities around holiday times that do not occur at other times of the year. Give yourself permission to be a tourist and have some good old-fashioned fun by participating in something new.
- **BE OF SERVICE** to those who are less fortunate than you: especially if you tend to feel lonely during the holidays. Helping others always lifts the spirit. Know that you are special for caring and contributing.
- **ASK FOR HELP** if you need help. People are glad to help when they are asked, especially during the holidays.
- **SIMPLIFY** your schedule during the holidays. More things interrupt routines during the holidays so plan ahead and make more time in your schedule by simplifying. Don't be afraid to say no if you find your stress level increasing too much.
- **EAT RIGHT** as food is usually plentiful. Monitor your intake of calories and try to eat healthy.
- **EXERCISE** regularly. Try taking walks with loved ones, it is a great way to exercise and feel close.
- **DO WHAT YOU KNOW** works to keep your stress down over the holidays. If you have had good results approaching the holidays in a particular way, then keep doing it. But if what you have always done causes great stress, change your behavior.
- **KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES** and stay away from people and places that risk your sobriety. Do not place yourself in any risky situations.
- **BRING SOMEONE ALONG** if you are going to a party where alcohol or other drugs will be present. A sponsor or another trusted person can help you stay away from the temptations and cravings by staying by your side and talking to you if need be.
- **REFLECT** on what is truly important in your life. Forget about traditions like 'New Year's Resolutions' and instead focus on how you want your life to be, and how you can make a difference every day.
- **TALK TO YOUR SPONSOR** and share your thoughts. Talking is tremendously therapeutic, and what better time of the year to share than during the holidays?