



FY25 - FIRST QUARTER *Employee Assistance Newsletter*

Welcome!

We are in the First Quarter of Fiscal Year 25. With the holidays quickly approaching, we want to equip with you with helpful information as you enter the season.

You will read about managing grief during what's supposed to be the most joyful time of the year.

We will address eight helpful ways you can stay mentally fit during the busy holiday season. Prioritizing your mental health during will set you up for success. You cannot pour into others if you're empty.

If you live far from your family during the holidays, you are faced with a different set of challenges. We will dive into practical tools so you can stay connected with those you love most.

As always, The Counseling Team is here to support you. Our DEA EAP hotline is (800) 275-7460. To reach the EAP office at HQ, call (571) 776-2990 or email eap@dea.gov.

We hope you find this resource helpful. Reach out to us with any questions you may have. Happy Holidays!



In This Edition...

Living Away From Loved Ones During the Holidays

Dealing with Holiday Grief

Staying Financially and Mentally Fit



FINDING HOPE AND HEALING: GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is often a time of joy and celebration. However, for those experiencing loss, the holidays can also be a painful reminder of loss. Grief is a deeply personal experience, marked by emotions including sadness, anger, confusion, and even moments of joy. The holidays can amplify these feelings and make it challenging to engage in traditional celebrations.

If you or someone close to you is navigating grief during the holidays, here are some strategies for coping and finding moments of peace & healing.

Strategies for Coping with Grief During the Holidays



1. Acknowledge Your Feelings

Allow yourself to feel your emotions without judgment. It's normal to experience sadness, anger, or longing during the holidays. Acknowledging your feelings is a vital part of the healing process. Consider journaling your thoughts or discussing them with a trusted friend or family member.

2. Create New Traditions

While it can be tempting to cling to past traditions, creating new rituals can provide a fresh perspective and help honor your loved one's memory. This could be as simple as lighting a candle in their honor, preparing their favorite dish, or volunteering in their name. New traditions can help you adapt to your loss while still celebrating the essence of the holiday.

3. Set Boundaries

It's essential to recognize your limits during this emotionally charged time. If you're not ready to attend large gatherings or participate in certain activities, it's okay to say no. Communicate your needs to friends and family, and prioritize self-care.

4. Seek Support

Surround yourself with compassionate people. Whether it's friends, family, or a support group, having a network to lean on can make a significant difference. Sharing your feelings with others who understand your grief can provide comfort & validation.



5. Honor and Remember

Finding ways to honor your loved one can be a meaningful part of coping with grief. Consider creating a memory box filled with photos, letters, and mementos that remind you of them. You could also participate in activities that they enjoyed or share stories about them with others to keep their memory alive.

6. Practice Mindfulness and Self-Care

Incorporating mindfulness practices into your daily routine can help ground you during moments of intense emotion. Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, or gentle yoga can provide a sense of calm. Additionally, prioritize self-care by ensuring you get enough rest, eat healthy food, and engage in activities that bring you joy.

7. Plan for Emotional Triggers

Holidays can bring unexpected reminders of your loss, whether it's a song, a smell, or a family gathering. Anticipating these triggers and having a plan in place can help you cope. For instance, if you know a particular family tradition is difficult, consider discussing it with loved ones or creating a new plan for that time.

8. Allow Yourself to Grieve

Remember that grief is not a linear process. It's normal to have good days and bad days, and it's essential to give yourself permission to grieve. Don't rush the healing process; allow yourself to experience grief in your own time and in your own way.

9. Consider Professional Help

If your grief feels overwhelming or unmanageable, consider seeking support from a mental health professional. Therapists and counselors can provide valuable tools and strategies to help you navigate your feelings during the holidays and beyond.

Coping with grief during the holidays is never easy, but it's important to remember that you are not alone. By acknowledging your feelings, creating new traditions, and seeking support, you can find moments of peace amid the sorrow. Recognizing that it's okay to feel a mix of emotions is the first step in healthy coping and healing.





STAYING FISCALLY AND MENTALLY FIT DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is often full of joy and celebration. However, it can bring challenges that can strain both our finances and mental health. Navigating these pressures while trying to maintain a sense of joy and well-being requires intentionality & planning. Here are strategies to help you stay fiscally and mentally fit during the holidays.

Managing Holiday Spending

1. Create a Budget

The first step to maintaining fiscal fitness during the holidays is to establish a budget. Assess your income and expenses, including gifts, food, decorations, and travel. Allocate specific amounts for each category and stick to your limits. This proactive approach can prevent overspending and reduce financial stress.

2. Prioritize Needs Over Wants

When shopping for gifts and holiday items, distinguish between needs and wants. Focus on meaningful gifts that align with your budget rather than succumbing to societal pressures to spend extravagantly. Consider homemade gifts or experiences that don't require significant financial outlay.

3. Take Advantage of Sales and Discounts

The holiday season is rife with sales and discounts. Plan your shopping around these opportunities to maximize your budget. Use apps and websites to compare prices and find the best deals. However, avoid impulse purchases just because an item is on sale.

4. Consider Alternative Celebrations

Explore non-traditional ways to celebrate the holidays that minimize financial strain. Potluck gatherings, gift exchanges with a set price limit, or experiences like hiking or movie nights can foster connection without breaking the bank.

5. Track Your Spending

Keep a record of your holiday spending to stay accountable to your budget. Regularly check your expenses to ensure you're on track. This practice can help you make adjustments if necessary and provide a clearer picture of your financial situation.





Mentally Fit: Nurturing Mental Health During the Holidays

1. Set Realistic Expectations

Holidays can evoke pressure to create the perfect celebration, which can lead to stress and disappointment. Set realistic expectations for yourself and your celebrations. Embrace the idea that perfection is not the goal; instead, focus on creating meaningful connections and experiences.

2. Practice Self-Care

Prioritize self-care during the holiday season. Make time for activities that rejuvenate you, whether it's reading, exercising, meditating, or spending time with loved ones. Engaging in self-care can help you recharge and better handle holiday stressors.

3. Establish Boundaries

It's essential to establish boundaries to protect your mental well-being. This may mean saying no to certain events or commitments that feel overwhelming. Communicate your limits to family and friends, ensuring they understand your need for balance.

4. Stay Active

Physical activity plays a crucial role in mental health. Incorporate regular exercise into your holiday routine, whether it's a brisk walk, yoga, or dancing. Exercise releases endorphins, which can improve your mood and help alleviate stress.

5. Connect with Others

While the holidays can be busy, maintaining social connections is vital for mental health. Reach out to friends and family, even if it's just a quick message or phone call. Sharing your thoughts and feelings can provide support and alleviate feelings of isolation.

6. Practice Mindfulness and Gratitude

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation or deep breathing, can help ground you during hectic moments. Cultivating gratitude by reflecting on what you appreciate in your life can shift your focus away from stressors & enhance your well-being.

7. Seek Professional Support if Needed

Consider seeking support from a mental health professional. They can provide coping strategies and guidance tailored to your needs.



HANDLING DISTANCE FROM LOVED ONES DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is a time for family gatherings, festive celebrations, and shared memories. However, for those living abroad or far from their loved ones, the holidays can evoke a deep sense of longing and isolation. Often due to work commitments or personal choices, being away from family during this special time can be challenging. Here are some strategies to help cope with the feelings of missing family during the holidays and to create meaningful connections despite the distance.

1. Embrace Virtual Connections

Technology has made it easier than ever to stay connected with loved ones, regardless of distance. Schedule regular video calls, virtual family gatherings, or watch parties to share in holiday traditions.

2. Create New Traditions

While you may miss your family's traditional holiday celebrations, consider creating new traditions that reflect your current situation. This could involve cooking a favorite family recipe, decorating your space, or participating in local holiday events. New traditions can provide a sense of belonging and help you celebrate the season in a meaningful way.

3. Send Care Packages or Gifts

Sending care packages or gifts to your family can be a thoughtful way to express your love and maintain a connection. Include personalized notes, photos, or items that remind them of you. Receiving a package can also help you feel more connected, as it serves as a tangible reminder of your relationship.

4. Engage in Local Celebrations

Explore local holiday events and traditions in your current location. Participating in community activities can help you feel more connected to your surroundings and distract you from feelings of loneliness. Attend festivals, markets, or holiday performances to immerse yourself in the local culture.



5. Reach Out to Friends

If you're away from family, lean on your friends for support. Gather with fellow expatriates or friends who may also be feeling the weight of distance during the holidays. Sharing experiences, cooking meals together, or even organizing a potluck can create a sense of community and belonging.

6. Practice Gratitude and Reflection

Take time to reflect on the positive aspects of your situation. Keeping a gratitude journal can help shift your focus from what you're missing to what you appreciate in your life. Acknowledge the experiences you've gained while living abroad, and cherish the memories you've created with family in the past.

7. Plan Future Visits

Having a visit to look forward to can ease feelings of longing. If possible, plan a trip home or organize a family gathering for a future holiday. Knowing you'll reunite with your loved ones can provide comfort and hope during the holiday season.

8. Seek Professional Support if Needed

If feelings of sadness or loneliness become overwhelming, consider seeking support from a mental health professional. Talking to someone about your feelings can provide valuable coping strategies and help you navigate the complexities of living away from loved ones.





WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR EAP SERVICES?



DEA
Employees



Spouses of DEA
Employees



Children of DEA Employees 26
or younger



Employee's Children
Any age **with** special needs



DEA Employee's Parents, In-Laws, and/or Others
Living **IN** the employee's home as a family member

We are here to help with our culturally competent clinical team that uses trauma-informed strategies to address the unique needs of DEA employees and their families. Asking for help is the first and most important step you can take to begin the process of healing and recovery.

CONTACT US

For a counseling referral in your area, contact The Counseling Team International's **DEA EAP Hotline at (800) 275-7460.**

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