

Caring for Your Mental Health

With holiday season looking different this year, help is available to those having trouble coping

Adapted from Albuquerque Journal article

Alternatives to large family gathering and events

- Make videos to send to family members. They can include special messages, music, dancing or candid footage.
- Share the meal remotely with a video call. Try to work out the kinks with a practice call before the big day.
- Cook food for family and friends and deliver it in a contactless way, like leaving it on the porch or another designated area.
- Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect. Create a new tradition or ritual.
- Go for a walk after eating. Physical activity can help alleviate stress and be a mood lifter. This might also be a good opportunity to call and talk with family.
- Shop online instead of in stores.

Most people have probably accepted by now that Christmas and other festivities are going to look different this year, but that doesn't make it any easier to accept.

The pandemic has led to job loss, isolation, fear, stress, and tense home situations for some, creating a surge in mental health problems.

NAMI is a grassroots organization that helps educate and support individuals, and their families, who are experiencing mental illness. The Albuquerque group was established in the mid-1980s. It's currently offering online support groups in both English and Spanish, and online courses. "Mostly what I'm hearing is people are struggling with isolation," Minnich said. "Or they are spending all of their time with family and significant others and they are not prepared for that."

The holidays can be a stressful time for many people and a trigger for others. Being alone during this time period might exacerbate feelings of depression, or trigger already existing mental health problems. The ongoing pandemic has some people pushed to their emotional limits but there are steps individuals can take to bolster their mental health.

Tips on coping with holiday stress and depression

- Prepare. Who will you call or reach out to that day? How will you spend the day? Schedule a time to call or speak with family and friends. Make a plan to help keep emotions and mental health in check.
 - Reach out to family, friends, religious organizations or online support groups to help control feelings of loneliness and isolation.
 - Take periodic breaks from the news and social media to reduce stress and anxiety.
 - Consider volunteering. Focusing on others can lift spirits.
- Many organizations are offering ways to help that require little to no contact.
- Schedule time to unwind.
 - Don't abandon healthy habits. Eat well, get plenty of sleep, maintain personal boundaries, exercise and avoid excessive amounts of alcohol and other drugs.
 - Embrace the temporary solitude. Use it as time to complete projects, read, rest.
 - Finally, seek professional help if you are having thoughts of suicide or your attempts at coping are not successful.

Source: The CDC, Mayo Clinic and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health.