

Tips for Personal Self-Care During the Holidays:



- * Connect socially. Make sure that you are spending time with people who support you. Consider planning fun activities with your partner, children, or friends;
- * Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet;
- * Exercise regularly;
- * Get plenty of sleep;
- * Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out. Take time for yourself doing something you enjoy;
- * Maintain a normal routine.

Source: *National Child Traumatic Stress Network*



Mission: Partnering with youth, adults, and families, St. Mary's Home for Children fosters resilience and potential through a continuum of innovative residential, community-based, education, and prevention services.

ST. MARY'S HOME FOR CHILDREN

AGENCY CHAT

CHANGE HAPPENS WITH AWARENESS OF TRAUMA

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER, 2019
MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS



We encourage you to take a few minutes to CHAT with your colleagues, friends and/or children as appropriate about important issues we all face in our world, and here at our trauma-informed agency.

Our CHATs are designed to introduce topics and start conversations, not to be a substitute for training or consultation with a professional. Please talk to a professional at St. Mary's if you are concerned or have questions about any of our suggested CHATs.

If you have ideas for an Agency CHAT, please contact any Program Director or the Executive Director. We strive to make CHATs meaningful and relevant to the issues facing children and families, as well as reflecting trauma-informed best practices.



November and December are often unpredictable and out-of-the-ordinary months filled with events & parties, shopping in busy stores, staying up late to watch special shows, having guests in and out of our home environments, visiting friends & family, and lazy school vacation days. We see happy images on TV and hear joyful songs on the radio. So when an afternoon or event doesn't go as planned or envisioned, we might find ourselves wondering 'Why do 'special' things get ruined?', or ' Why am I seeing attachment-seeking behavior when we've arranged so many special things'?

It is important to understand the impact this season can have on many of our clients—and on our self, our colleagues, friends and neighbors—so that we don't wonder those things in the first place. The more we understand it, the more we're able to provide our clients with the trauma-informed and proper supports needed not just to 'get through the season', but to continue facilitating healing processes by doing everything we can to help experience successes this season.

First, consider the change in and/or lack of routine around the holidays. Youth with a trauma history thrive on structure and routine. Predictability helps them feel safe and lowers a bit of activation in their nervous system. When life becomes unpredictable, the nervous systems go on high-alert and causes them to see 'danger' when there isn't any. To help, post and refer to a written schedule that includes special event details (location, who will be there, when it starts and ends, etc.). Stick to the schedule.

Second, consider the sensory overload during this time of year. Many of our youth have a sensitive sensory processing system. This makes excess noise, crowds of people and bright lights very difficult to manage. Extra sensory input can leave youth at the edge of their window of tolerance,

meaning they're more easily triggered into dysregulated & maladaptive behavior. Plan and prepare before going to events and activities. Bring sensory tools that have proven helpful for individual youth such as a weighted vest, pocket rock, ring pop, sour candy or headphones. Agree on a back-up activity that's equally as fun, and engage the youth in making an exit strategy if the stimulation is too much at the first event.

Third, be mindful of youth's negative sense of self, something that can be one of the most debilitating impacts of early childhood trauma. People who experience abuse, neglect or other trauma without a strong support system in place start to believe things like "I'm bad," "I only deserve bad things". Being offered good things like holiday gifts or fun activities puts youth in conflict with their inner world. Our body and brain likes to stay in equilibrium even if the equilibrium is negative. Youth may unconsciously solicit experiences or relationships that validate their negative beliefs, which unfortunately they view as normal, safe or comfortable. To help in this area, pull from the education & skills in 'Trauma and the Brain' and 'Attachment' trainings, or ask your child's therapist for individual ideas.

Finally, remember that the holidays season can trigger both implicit and explicit memories in some of our clients. It's likely that many adults and providers can empathize with this. We might navigate well through the holidays but still feel glimmers of sadness or regret, remembering happy memories that are no longer present or sad memories we'd rather forget. Our clients may be having similar holiday experiences but haven't yet healed enough or developed the skills needed to navigate things quite the same due to their traumatic experiences. To help, we can listen, slow down, limit or manage sensory input, and stay in a routine as much as possible. **Source: Robyn Gobbel, LCSW, Austin Texas, Child & Family Therapist specializing in adoption, trauma, and attachment counseling.**