

# Expert offers advice for coping with holiday stress and anxiety

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With the holiday season in full swing, the added demands on adults and children can increase stress and anxiety in the home. It is important to recognize triggers early to get ahead of them. Virginia Tech expert

Rosanna Breaux offers tips on ways to identify stressors and how to cope.

"The holidays are a trigger for many, whether they don't have a good relationship with [family members](#), are recently bereaved, or they just struggle to adjust to the sunless winter days," says Rosanna Breaux, director of the Child Study Center and an assistant professor with the Virginia Tech Department of Psychology.

"For children, stress and anxiety might be around disruptions to their regular routine during the [school year](#) and having overly-scheduled social events with their family, long car rides, meeting and having to speak to extended family members or adults that they do not know or don't know well, having to split time between homes in cases of co-parenting, or recognizing injustices and inequalities in the world," said Breaux.

"For adults, there are many stressors such as financial concerns and increased expenses due to [holiday celebrations](#), overly scheduled social calendars, end of the year deadlines at work, and wanting your children to be happy and appreciative for what they have/are given. Trying to keep peace at a holiday dinner with differing political perspectives or keeping your children entertained and not fighting while home from school are added stressors during the holidays," said Breaux.

Breaux shares the following advice on ways to cope with anxiety surrounding the holidays.

1. Recognize that it's okay to not feel festive and merry and that you are not the only one who feels this way.
2. Try not to compare yourself with others.
3. Set realistic expectations for what the [holiday season](#) will be like. If you recently lost someone or you are trying to remove toxic people from your life that may add to your stress and this means

that traditions will change.

4. Try to be proactive in identifying your triggers. For some, it could be special memories of different things, for others it may be certain people, conversations, or events that occur each year. If you can identify what is making you feel agitated, stressed, or worried, you can take steps to avoid or cope with that stressor.
5. Think about what advice you might give to a friend who was going through the same situation—it is often easier to think about things rationally when we remove ourselves from the situation.
6. Set boundaries and limits. If you are going to a holiday event with a significant other, friends, or your family, consider setting a clear time for when you might leave to limit how long you may be at a stressful event.
7. Limit the number of things you will do in a given day or week to avoid feeling overscheduled.
8. Practice self care with changes in routines due to being off from work and school, it is easy to let your sleep, exercise, or eating habits slide. Remember, you need to focus on your own self care in order to take care of your family; think of the oxygen mask analogy, put your mask on first before your kids.
9. Try to eat well balanced meals outside of the parties you attend as eating impacts your mood and ability to focus and manage stress.
10. Make time to go for a walk outside or engage in an activity that will help you refocus and feel calm; for example, taking a hot bath, deep breathing, meditating.

When planning for holiday events, Breaux says to be as prepared as possible and bring things to keep your children entertained.

"Take time to sit down as a family before any [holiday](#) event and prepare everyone with a rough timeline of events of what to expect, who will be

there, and general expectations of behavior," said Breaux. "Using 'if-then' statements to encourage behavior can be helpful. For example, if you are able to mind your manners and keep your hands to yourself during dinner, then you can play on your iPad for 30 minutes when we get home."

Provided by Virginia Tech

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