

Well-Being Tip

November 2025



Finding Peace During the Holiday Season

Sometimes it seems as if we *should* be feeling a certain way this time of year. Watching holiday movies or social media influencers' highlight reels can make us feel like we are “supposed” to be feeling joyful, relaxed, and fancy free during the holiday season, but that isn't everyone's experience. Between wrapping up final exams, shopping for gifts, and making plans to visit family, it can be difficult to carve out time to relax during precious few holiday vacation days. If the holiday season usually has you feeling more stressed out than blissed out, MSCC is here to offer a few practical suggestions for de-stressing this year.

Get real about money

People tend to feel pressure to spend a lot of money on gifts and food. Chances are that if you are feeling stressed about going over budget to satisfy social norms related holiday spending, so are some of the people in your life.

- Talk openly with family and friends about spending caps for gift exchanges. Consider some budget-friendly gifting options like a white elephant gift exchange or offering homemade gifts to one another.
- Alternatively, you could ditch gift-giving all together and opt to give the gift of intentional time together to one another. You might consider planning low-cost or free activities, like playing board games, cooking or baking together at home, or having a movie night.

Be considerate of your own needs

It's easy to get caught up in everyone else's expectations of how we should spend our time during the holiday season. See if you can find some quiet, alone time to reflect on what you are needing most from your days "off" from school or work. Are you craving some owntime to pick back up old hobbies? Would you love to sit down for dinner with some old friends to catch up? Intentionally schedule this time for yourself the same way you would schedule an important meeting. Do your best to honor your commitment to making time for you.

Set healthy holiday boundaries

Boundaries are the limits we set with ourselves and with others that allow us to protect our own well-being and maintain healthy relationships. Here are a few examples of holiday boundaries:

- Emotional boundary example

Situation: A family member comments about person A's body shape and size...again.

Person A's boundary: "I'd rather not talk about my body today. Let's focus on enjoying our meal and catching up."

- Time boundary example

Situation: It's a holiday tradition to stay late at grandma's house playing card games and drinking, but Person A wants a good night's sleep and doesn't really like to drink.

Person A's boundary: "I'm looking forward to playing card games with everyone tonight, but I'll need to leave by 9 pm so I can get some rest tonight."

Or maybe...

- "I'm going to drive separately tonight so that I can get back home at a time that works for me."

Setting boundaries can be uncomfortable, especially while the people in our lives are initially adjusting to them. With time, clear, consistent boundaries can foster an increased sense of trust and respect within relationships.

You're not alone

The therapists at MSCC are here to support you if you're concerned about navigating stressors this holiday season, or anytime. Please reach out to us if you'd like to schedule a consult appointment.

Support Spaces

Join clinicians from the Office of Education Support and the Medical Student Counseling Center for Support Spaces, a support group open to all CCOM students. Food is provided.

- December 10 from 12:00-1:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room
- December 15 from 5:00-6:00 pm in Kelch Conference Room

[Connect with the MSCC](#)

The Medical Student Counseling Center (MSCC) offers free, confidential personal counseling, disability and accessibility services, and wellness consultations to MD and PA students.

[Contact MSCC](#)

Email: osac-mscc@uiowa.edu Phone: 319-335-8056

(Email should not be used to share confidential information or in the event of an emergency.)

If you are in crisis or you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text 9-8-8 or 844-461-5420.

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