



Know! Healthy Ways to Handle Holiday Stress

Ready or not, the holiday season is here, along with all the festivities and fun that go along with it: family gatherings, shared meals, gift-giving, party planning, special school and church events, hosting out-of-town family stays, and on and on. It's enough to make your head spin just thinking about it.

The question is, how do you plan to handle the extra stress that accompanies this time of year?

If your route to relieve stress includes pouring a glass of wine or grabbing a cold beer, you're certainly not alone. Many adults reach for alcohol to relax and destress. While an occasional drink is ok for most people, depending on alcohol to lift your mood can be problematic, both emotionally and physically, for yourself and your children.

While alcohol is a sedative, and can help ease nerves momentarily, it is a short-term fix to what can become a long-term problem. It is an unhealthy coping strategy that can increase a person's anxiety and depression, and lead to addiction.

We also must remember that our children are always observing our behavior, whether we recognize it or not. If they learn from us that it is ok to reach for alcohol when we are stressed, worried or feeling down – that is a problem.

Instead, we can teach by example healthy ways to handle stress, that do not involve the use of substances.

The Mayo Clinic offers a stress-reducing strategy called the 4 A's, that we can put into practice for ourselves and role model for our children: avoid, alter, accept, or adapt. The way it works is that with any given situation that increases our stress, we look for ways to apply one or more of these concepts.

Avoid: Believe it or not, a lot of stress can simply be avoided. Plan ahead, learn to say no, and ditch parts of your to-do list (low priority items).

Alter: Take inventory of whatever stressful situation you find yourself in, then consider ways you change or modify it for the better.

Accept: Sometimes we have no other option than to accept things the way they are. When this is the case, it is important to talk to someone, to forgive, to practice positive self-talk, and to learn from our mistakes.

Adapt: There are times when we need to adjust or revise the standards and expectations we set upon ourselves, which many times are unreasonable. What can help to change one's perspective is to ask yourself, "Will this matter in a year or in five years?"

Just because you've traditionally hosted Thanksgiving doesn't mean someone else can't take a turn. If your holiday to-do list becomes overwhelming, look it over and see what you can cut out. If you're tired of being the punchline of your cousin's jokes at family gatherings, ask him or her to leave you out of the comedy routine. Give yourself and others grace and do your best to put a stressful situation in perspective.

In addition to a well-balanced diet, exercise, social connectedness, and quality sleep, the Mayo Clinic's 4 A's technique can help you balance the stress equation for a more peaceful, enjoyable holiday season for yourself and your students.

Sources:

[Cleveland Clinic: Why You Shouldn't Rely on Alcohol During Times of Stress. April 2020.](#)

[Mayo Clinic: Need stress relief? Try the 4 A's. July 2021.](#)

Tips For Mentors and Adult Allies

Help young people avoid turning to substances for stress relief by sharing healthy coping strategies:

- Maintain a well-balanced diet
- Get daily exercise – outside when possible
- Stay connected to friends and family
- Get good quality sleep
- Put the 4 A's – as shared in this tip

About Know! Parent Tips

Everyone has a role in prevention. By reading and sharing this Know! Parent Tip today, you're doing your part to prevent substance misuse and create a healthier world for all.

We created these free parent tips to empower parents like you. Know! helps you promote health and wellness and protect the young person in your life from unhealthy behaviors, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. However, we rely on donations from people like you to provide these tips. If you found this tip interesting or helpful, **[please consider donating at preventionactionalliance.org/donate](https://preventionactionalliance.org/donate)**.

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