

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Holiday Stress

Employer Tips to Help Your Employees' Season Be a Little Brighter

By Dr. Joel Axler, *National Behavior Health Leader*



The holiday season is filled with activities to bring us together and help spread joy and happiness to others. However, the holiday season can also be stressful, and everyday events can have a larger impact on the mental and physical health of your employees.

We all feel stressed from time to time, but the holidays bring unique strains that pervade into the workplace and reduce productivity. Managers and HR supervisors should understand how to help identify and address issues stemming from employees' holiday stress in the workplace.

There are warning signals that indicate that an employee may be experiencing higher-than-normal holiday anxiety. These signs can all be indicators of increased stress.

- Change in behavior, such as increased sensitivity and anger
- Lack of focus or concentration
- Change in quality of work performance
- Unusual tension with peers and teammates or withdrawn behaviors
- Change in appearance or hygiene
- Increased tardiness or absenteeism

Opportunities for Employers to Provide Support to Help with Holiday Stress

Employers are becoming increasingly focused on the physical, financial and emotional well-being of their workforce. Guiding employees to services available through your benefits program is an opportunity to connect them to the resources they may need to help them through the holiday season.

1

Enhance Well-Being Programs. Incorporate wellness breaks to enable employees to refocus, such as encouraging a walk outside or granting access to meditation and yoga. Encourage employees to stay home when sick to help mitigate the spread of illness in the workplace and give employees information on how to help them stay healthy.



2 Support Time Off and Flexible Working Arrangements. Many employees may need increased flexibility during the holidays. This could take the form of work-from-home arrangements, alternative work schedules and encouraging employees to seek work/life balance, including time away. Remind employees of their options, including talking to their manager if they need time to cope with family issues. Help employees prioritize projects to manage deadlines that might be causing added stress.

3 Create Internal Networking Groups. Many employers have Employee Resource Groups for like-minded colleagues to strengthen communities and provide support. Motivate employees to work together as a team to share the workload, connect with one another, share ideas and receive peer-to-peer support. This can help them feel more connected to one another and your company.

4 Lean on Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Often an under-promoted and under-utilized benefit, your EAP can offer meaningful support to employees concerned with their emotional well-being during this stressful time of year. These confidential and no-cost opportunities to connect with mental health professionals, and helpful resources in your community and beyond, can be a lifeline for a struggling employee.

5 Reinforce Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coverage. If needs extend beyond what your EAP can provide, be sure employees understand benefits coverage for mental health and substance use disorder services for those enrolled in your medical plan. Benefits generally include behavioral health treatment like psychotherapy and counseling, mental health inpatient services and treatment for substance use disorder.

Tips Employers Can Offer Employees

Being realistic, practicing positive self-talk and identifying your own limits can help ward off stress and depression. Below are some practical tips to minimize the stress that can accompany the holidays.



Acknowledge Your Feelings. Give yourself permission to take time for yourself and express your feelings. You can't force yourself to feel merry and bright just because it is the holiday season. It is appropriate to be comfortable sharing your feelings and learning to say "no." Friends and colleagues will likely understand if you can only participate in some projects or activities. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, consider removing something else from your to-do list. A work-home balance should be a priority.



Connect to Others. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek community, religious or other social events that can help offer support and companionship. If you're feeling sad during the holidays, consider reaching out to a friend or family member about your concerns. Try reaching out with a text, call or video chat. Volunteering your time or doing something to help others is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal at a friend's home during the holidays.



Set Realistic Expectations. The holidays don't have to be perfect. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often evolve. Choose a few to hold on to and be open to creating new ones. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't meet your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. Even if your holiday plans may look different this year, you can find ways to celebrate.



Maintain Healthy Habits. Try to eat healthy meals and avoid going overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Get plenty of sleep and include regular physical activity in your daily routine. Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga. Find an activity you enjoy that helps reduce stress by clearing your mind and keeping you calm. Be aware of how our "information overload" culture can produce undue stress and adjust your time reading news and social media as you see fit.



Plan Ahead and Stick to a Budget. Before you do your gift and food shopping, decide on a budget, then try your best to stick with it. Plan your menus, then make your shopping list. Set up a family gift exchange or give homemade gifts, helping to not only make them more meaningful but often also more affordable.

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress that can descend during the holidays. With some planning and positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, seek professional help and talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.



About the Author

Dr. Joel Axler, National Behavior Health Leader

Dr. Axler is a board-certified child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist with more than 30 years of experience in academic, private practice and insurance settings. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He serves on several executive committees and organizations, including the Georgia Psychiatric Physicians Association and the Georgia Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



Brown & Brown

Find Your Solution at [BBrown.com](https://www.BBrown.com)

Brown & Brown, Inc. and all its affiliates, do not provide legal, regulatory or tax guidance, or advice. If legal advice counsel or representation is needed, the services of a legal professional should be sought. The information in this document is intended to provide a general overview of the topics and services contained herein. Brown & Brown, Inc. and all its affiliates, make no representation or warranty as to the accuracy or completeness of the document and undertakes no obligation to update or revise the document based upon new information or future changes.

©2024 Brown & Brown. All rights reserved.