

MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS

For some Veterans and their Families, the holidays can be a tough time of the year. Crowded gatherings and pressure to socialize can feel overwhelming. Here are some ways to help manage stress over the holidays.



MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

- Encourage everyone to contribute to the holiday plans. This way, there's a better chance that everyone's expectations can be met.
- Keep it simple and don't overschedule. Try not to overcommit your time and energy.

NORMALIZE FEELINGS

- **Identify signs of overwhelm:** Notice if you have sweaty palms, a heavy chest or shallow breathing. Observe whether you feel nauseated, irritated or impatient. Being aware of your feelings can help you cope with them safely.
- **Give kids space and support to share their feelings:** Kids may be angry, disappointed, or scared fearful that a Family member isn't feeling well. They may also feel happy and excited, but are unsure how to show it when a Family member is impacted by PTSD.
- **Model (as best you can) the behaviour you want to see in your kids:** Show compassion and love for Family members with PTSD without villainizing or blaming them. Kids observe the adults in their lives closely and learn from what they see.



PLAN AHEAD FOR SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- How long will you stay? Create an exit plan to leave early if you need to.
- If you are single, will you need a buddy to attend with you?
- If the gathering is at home, where will you go if you need space to decompress?
- Be kind to yourself. Remember it is okay to say no to socializing.

PLAN TIME FOR SELF-CARE

- Plan something to look forward to. If you are on your own, treat yourself to a favourite meal, an activity you enjoy, or something extra special to indulge in.
- Schedule separate times for the kids and the adults in the Family
- Book extra appointments with your mental health professional



The holidays can look different for everyone.
It's okay to step back from traditions that don't serve you.

Create your own celebrations that feel good for you and your Family.

