

Holiday planning during COVID-19

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, holidays, special events, picnics and celebrations have changed dramatically. For many people, this is the first time they have been confronted with empty chairs at the table because loved ones cannot or are unwilling to attend family gatherings. Cherished traditions and religious events may have been canceled due to the virus, with no clear end in sight to social distancing restrictions. People who live alone or far from family, or who have lost loved ones, may find holidays especially difficult.

These changes can trigger a variety of emotions, from grief to guilt or anger. Holidays may not be the same, however, there are various ways to find peace and moments of joy in the midst of the sadness and sense of loss that we may sometimes feel.

Here are some suggestions for handling holiday planning during the pandemic:

- Think about changing your family traditions to adapt to social distancing. If hosting a big dinner, meeting up with friends and attending holiday parties are no longer possible, consider virtual alternatives to keep in touch with important people in your life.
- Follow the CDC's recommendations when organizing a gathering at your home. If possible, hold outdoor events with a small group of local friends and family members, make sure everyone wears a mask, maintain social distance and do not share food or drinks.
- If you have lost a loved one, honor their memory with a special ornament, wreath or centerpiece, or perhaps a candle lit during a holiday. If you can, take part in a voluntary activity that your loved one used to do.
- If in-person religious services or events have changed see if you can still participate via televised services, video chats and online prayer meetings.

Most importantly, take care of your mental health. The pandemic has increased stress and anxiety levels for many people. If you feel overwhelmed, try to replace negative thoughts by focusing on the things you can control. Building your resilience skills can help protect your mental health.

Try these tips to use your strengths and build resilience:

- Keep connected by staying in touch with positive and supportive people, even if you cannot see them in person.
- Recharge your batteries by allowing yourself time every day to do something you like. Taking time to engage in a pleasant activity or hobby will give you a positive lift.
- Keep your sense of humor by seeking out things that make you laugh.
- Practice gratitude by focusing on the things you are grateful for every day liked loved ones and nature.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

Sources:

- *Coronavirus: Building Mental Health Resilience. (2020). Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/April-2020/Coronavirus-Building-Mental-Health-Resilience>.*
- *Virginia Department of Health. (2020). Retrieved July 22, 2020, from <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/frequently-asked-questions/observing-religious-holidays-during-covid-19/>*