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EAP Newsletter

The end of year edition

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Making People Better



In this month's newsletter we talk about how to cope with family conflict during the holidays, important things to know about grief, and the health benefits of moving your body in the winter. We also discuss how to be more inclusive of people with disabilities.

This newsletter includes information about sensitive and potentially triggering topics.

How to cope with family conflict during the holidays



1/ Be realistic and plan

When you plan what you're going to do with your family, incorporate their expectations but try to balance them with what you want, too. It can also be helpful to set boundaries and schedule downtime for yourself. You may also want to consider planning meaningful activities like walks or games instead of just sitting around to encourage positive interactions. Being mindful of tricky family dynamics and anticipating issues ahead of time can help you to better manage conflict when, and if, it does occur.



3/ Communicate effectively

Use positive and clear language and try to stay objective during disagreements if they arise. The holiday season can bring up old emotions and family power dynamics, so try to focus on the present. Listen actively and respect differing opinions - sometimes it may be worth agreeing to disagree. If you have children around, focus on them - be civil with each other for their sakes.



5/ Moderate alcohol intake

Alcohol can be a double-edged sword - the disinhibiting effects can lead to laughter and fun interactions like games or karaoke that you might not normally feel confident enough to do. However, alcohol can also lead to arguments, saying things you might later regret and negative physical effects, such as vomiting or hangovers. Drink in moderation to keep things light and enjoyable or try low or no alcohol substitutes.



2/ Prioritise self-care

Plan moments for yourself that take you away from the business of a group situation, like a brisk walk, a warm bath, or a podcast. Whatever helps give you a breather and puts a smile on your face shouldn't stop during the festive season - self-care is just as important, if not more so, during this time as any other time of the year. Remember, you can't control others' happiness, but taking care of your own wellbeing can positively impact those around you.



4/ Practice mindfulness and gratitude

When stress arises, try to take a moment to ground yourself. Focus on the positive and reframe negative thinking if you are able - instead of thinking 'it's annoying to have family around', try to think 'I'm lucky to have family I can spend time with'. In chaotic moments, pause, look around, and enjoy the small moments.



6/ Accept that disagreements are normal

Finally, accept that disagreements are a normal part of every relationship, especially during the holidays. If conflict arises, ask yourself if the issue is important to tackle right now, or can it be put aside so you can enjoy this time with family and friends.



A short guide to grief: Important things to know and strategies to manage difficult times

Grief can feel especially challenging during the holiday season, a time typically associated with joy, family, and celebration. The emphasis on togetherness and joy may highlight the absence of a loved one, intensifying those feelings of sadness and loneliness.

It's common to feel disconnected from the festive spirit, and the contrast between personal grief and external joy can make the season feel isolating and difficult to manage.

We understand how difficult this time can be for those who've experienced loss. Our mental health specialists have shared a short guide which may help you during this time.

Grief involves intense emotions

Grief often brings intense feelings like sadness, shock, numbness, denial, and anger. These emotions can come in waves and may feel overwhelming at times.

Grief is a unique process

Everyone experiences grief differently. It can be emotionally draining, making simple tasks or even leaving the house difficult. While some people become more active to cope, others may need more rest and time alone.

Grief has no set pattern

Cultural differences can shape how people express grief. Some may be open and expressive, while others prefer to keep their emotions private. Even though you may always miss your loved one, most people eventually find meaning, pleasure, and even new strength in life after a loss.

Grief can resemble depression

Grief and depression share similar symptoms - some people do develop depression after a significant loss, especially if it's traumatic. If grief feels prolonged or intense, making it hard to function, it may be helpful to seek support. Some people describe this period as feeling emotionally stuck and are unable to move beyond the sorrow, whilst others say they feel lost and alone.

Five strategies to help manage feelings of grief



1/ Take care of yourself physically to support yourself emotionally

The connection between mind and body means that when you feel physically healthy, you're better equipped to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising. Avoid using alcohol or drugs to numb the pain. Instead, go for walks, meditate, practice yoga, or visit the gym when you can.



3/ Express your feelings creatively

If talking about your loss feels too difficult, try expressing your emotions in other ways. Writing in a journal, creating a scrapbook, or volunteering for a cause related to your loss can help. Spend time with supportive people—whether that's talking about your loved one or simply being around others who understand.



5/ Give yourself time

Grieving is a unique process, and there is no set timeline. Allow yourself the time and space to navigate your emotions and accept that it's okay to move at your own pace. It's not always easy, but it's important to let the process happen.



2/ Communicate your needs

It's okay to need space and say no to visitors, but it's also okay to ask for help when you need it. Be clear with those around you about what you're comfortable with and what kind of support you need. If you're struggling, don't hesitate to reach out to professional services, support provided by your employer, or consult your doctor.



4/ Try to maintain hobbies and interests

Sticking to your routines and engaging in activities that bring you joy can help you process your grief. During this difficult time, connecting with others and doing things you love can provide comfort and a sense of normalcy. Whether it's socialising, listening to music, or expressing yourself creatively, maintaining your interests can boost your mood and help you to cope.

The health benefits of moving your body in the winter

Winter can be a challenging time for staying active. With shorter days, colder temperatures, and often gloomy weather, it's tempting to stay indoors and adopt a sedentary lifestyle. However, movement during the winter months is crucial for physical and mental health.

Staying active can help combat the seasonal slump and keep you energised, both physically and emotionally. Here's how:



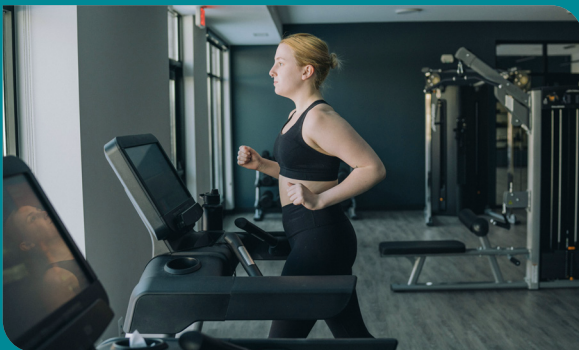
Boosts immunity

Regular physical activity can strengthen your immune system, making it more effective at warding off colds and other winter illnesses. Exercise increases circulation, which helps white blood cells move through the body more efficiently, enhancing your immune response. So keeping active can be a proactive way to stay healthy during the height of cold and flu season.



Improves mood and mental health

Winter is often associated with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and lower moods due to reduced sunlight exposure. Exercise, particularly outdoor movement, when possible, can help combat these feelings. Physical activity releases endorphins, also known as the “feel-good” hormones, which can help boost mood and alleviate stress. Even 20-minutes of moderate exercise a day can significantly improve your mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.



Supports cardiovascular health

Winter weather can make people more prone to staying indoors, leading to prolonged periods of inactivity. Regular movement helps to maintain cardiovascular health by improving circulation and heart function. Engaging in activities like fast walking, cycling, or indoor workouts can keep your heart healthy and maintain your stamina throughout the colder months.



Enhance energy levels

While the cold may make you feel sluggish, exercise can actually boost your energy levels. Regular movement helps improve blood flow and oxygen supply throughout the body, which can make you feel more alert and less fatigued. Incorporating movement into your winter routine can help you feel more awake and energised throughout the day.

How to motivate yourself to move during the colder months

It can be really hard to find the motivation to exercise in the winter. But we know that the benefits are plentiful at this time of the year. If you're struggling to get moving, try out these four tips:



Set realistic goals

Winter can make it harder to stick to long workouts or maintain high levels of activity. Start small—set achievable goals like a 15-minute walk or an online workout session at home. Gradually build up your activity level as you get comfortable. Breaking down your exercise routine into smaller, manageable chunks can make it feel less overwhelming.



Work out with a friend

Exercising with a friend can be a great motivator, providing accountability and making the experience more enjoyable. Agree to attend a class together, go for a lunchtime walk, or try a new online workout - whichever activity you choose, having a partner to do it with will help you stay consistent and motivated.



Find activities you enjoy

It's easier to stay active when you enjoy what you're doing. Whether it's a winter sport like ice skating, or simply a walk in a nearby park, choose activities that make you feel good. Indoor options like yoga, pilates, or dance workouts can also be fun ways to stay moving without having to brave the cold.



Create a routine and stick to it

Establishing a consistent routine can help you stay committed. Whether it's a morning stretch, a lunchtime walk or an evening workout, try to incorporate movement into your daily schedule. Consistency can turn exercise into a habit, making it easier to maintain when low in motivation.



How to be more inclusive of people with disabilities

On December 3rd, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of promoting the rights and wellbeing of people with disabilities in all aspects of society and development. It also encourages us to recognise and address the barriers caused by ableism that still persist in many areas.

Creating a more inclusive and accessible world is an ongoing effort that everyone can contribute to. Here are five meaningful ways we can support individuals with disabilities, with inclusivity in mind.



Communication is key

When communicating with someone who has a disability, it's important to always speak directly to them and be led by their communication needs - even if there is someone else present during these interactions, such as a support worker or British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter. This may sound like an obvious thing to do, but sadly people with disabilities are often overlooked or shut out from conversations. We must work to ensure people with disabilities feel included, heard, and listened to.



Never make assumptions about someone's needs

Not all disabilities are visible. In fact, of the one in five people in the UK who have a disability, 80% have a non-visible disability (NHS). Some individuals wear a Sunflower Hidden Disabilities Lanyard to indicate that they have a non-visible disability, but this is not always the case. It's important to keep an open mind, have empathy, and avoid making judgements of others. You may see someone using a disabled toilet instead of waiting in a queue. Consider that they may have a disability which is not obvious, and do not assume they can use, or wait for, a non-disabled toilet.



Make reasonable adjustments

Always consider that people with disabilities might require reasonable adjustments. These could be adjustments to support someone in their job - for example, receiving resources or letters in an Easy Read Format or large print. It is good practice to include a statement around reasonable adjustments in communications at work - in meeting invites, for example - so colleagues have the opportunity to request them if required.



Avoid inappropriate curiosity

While it's essential to listen to people with disabilities, and to try to understand the impact of someone's disability, it's really important to avoid inappropriate curiosity - for example, asking intrusive questions or leaning into stereotypes. Remember, it is up to the individual how much information they share with you, and we should always be led by them and respect boundaries.



Think about accessibility within physical spaces

People with disabilities may have additional requirements in order to access buildings or certain locations - an individual with a physical disability might require a wheelchair accessible building. Or somebody with autism might require a location which does not cause sensory overload - for example, locations that are not too noisy or busy. It's important to think about the accessibility of spaces in and outside of the workplace.

What is ableism?

According to Sense - a deafblind charity in the UK - ableism is a word for unfairly favouring non-disabled people. In an ableist society, it's assumed that the "normal" way to live is as a non-disabled person. It is ableist to believe that non-disabled people are more valuable to society than disabled people. Common examples of ableism include:



Designing a building with no ramps or lifts for wheelchairs.



Telling someone that they "don't look disabled" as a compliment.



Failing to make information available in an accessible format, such as braille or British Sign Language (BSL).



Choosing a non-disabled job candidate over a disabled one, because you think disability will make someone less productive.

3 resources to enhance your understanding of disability inclusivity:

Autism Friendly Guides

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/autism-friendly-guide>

The Social Model of Disability

<https://www.scope.org.uk/social-model-of-disability>

Non-Visible Disabilities Index

<https://hdsunflower.com/row/insights/category/invisible-disabilities>



Our tip of the month

Check in on your water intake.

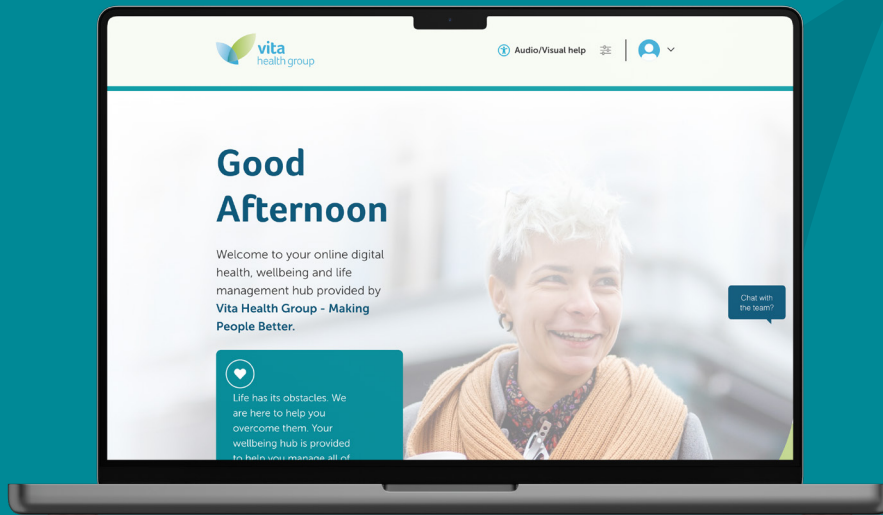
In winter, it's easy to forget about staying hydrated, but it's just as important as in warmer months. Cold air and indoor heating can cause dehydration, leading to dry skin, fatigue, and weakened immunity.

Make a habit of drinking water throughout the day, and include warm beverages like herbal teas to keep fluids up and stay cosy. Foods with high water content - such as soups, stews, and fruits like oranges - can also help maintain hydration. Keeping your body well-hydrated supports your immune system, skin health, and overall energy levels during the winter months.

On-Demand Digital Wellbeing Programmes

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Our digital wellbeing programmes provide the skills necessary to better manage everyday issues that affect your emotional and overall wellbeing.



Interactive, Practical, Wellbeing Programmes

These programmes provide participants with tools and strategies to create small behavioural changes that allow them to reduce stress and increase resilience and emotional health through various techniques.

- Stress programme
- Positive Body Image programme
- Mindfulness programme
- Resilience programme
- Sleep programme
- Money Worries programme
- Parinatal Wellbeing programme
- Alcohol programme
- Breast Cancer programme – Depression & Anxiety

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Clinically Verified

Up to
80%

of participants show improvement in depression and anxiety symptoms.

Up to
93%

users satisfaction.

Up to
65%

of users achieve clinically significant improvement.

Helped over
1m+

users think and feel better.

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