



# Mental Health & the Holidays: Strategies for the Clinician



While the holidays tend to be a time of joy for some, it is often a difficult, stressful time for others. During the holidays, individuals report that positive moods are significantly more prevalent than negative ones which may be attributed to feelings of love, happiness, satisfaction, and activity.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these positive feelings, there are also feelings of nervousness, tension, fatigue, and other negative emotions among individuals which can greatly impact overall mental well-being.<sup>1</sup>

## Findings from December 2023 APA Healthy Minds Monthly Poll<sup>2</sup>



**29% of adults say they expect to feel stressed about the holiday season (decrease of 2% from 2022)**



**Potential drivers of stress include affording holiday gifts (51%), meals (39%) finding and securing gifts (40%)**



**64% of individuals with mental illness reported that their conditions worsened around the holidays<sup>3</sup>**



**Younger adults making less than 50k annually are more likely to be stressed about affording the holidays<sup>3</sup>**



# Suicide Rates During the Holidays

**Between the end of September 2022 and the end of December 2022, overall suicide rates decreased by 1.1 per 100,000 individuals<sup>4</sup>**

Contrary to popular belief, **suicide rates decrease in December** and are lowest on Christmas Day, but unfortunately **reach a peak on New Year's Day** before returning to the usual yearly rate. This might be explained through the several positive interactions one may have during the holidays or the hope that it will be positive which serves as protective factors.<sup>5</sup>

However, it seems these positive, happy feelings may quickly dwindle with the new year. On and after New Year's Day, suicide rates were seen to increase possibly as a result of heavy substance use and the "**Broken Promise Effect.**"<sup>5</sup>



***Broken Promise Effect:*** when the holidays do not live up to one's expectations, individuals experience a negative mood afterward (NIH)<sup>5</sup>

## Southeast and National Suicide Statistics<sup>4</sup>

Location	Rate of Suicides in 2022 Q3 (per 100,000)	Rate of Suicides in 2022 Q4 (per 100,000)	TOTAL CHANGE
National	15.4	14.3	-1.1
Georgia	13.1	14.7	+1.6
Florida	15.6	15.0	-0.6
Tennessee	17.7	16.0	-1.7
Alabama	17.3	15.4	-1.9
Kentucky	17.8	19.7	+1.9
Mississippi	14.4	13.1	-1.3
North Carolina	15.6	14.7	-0.9
South Carolina	16.3	16.5	+0.2

# Clinical Practices for Providers



**As the holidays approach, consider implementing the following tips into your practice to improve patient outcomes and care compliance:**

## Evidence Based Approaches

- **Implementing regular suicide risk assessments**, particularly around the holidays, is helpful in measuring overall suicidality and whether the patient will be safe and is capable of taking care of oneself during these weeks
- **Implementing a trauma-informed approach** can also be helpful as there may be a high chance of re-traumatization for patients during holiday events if they return home or attend other events <sup>6</sup>

## Crisis Care Resources

- On-Demand Recordings: [Southeast MHHTC Suicide Risk Assessment Part 1: Planning](#) and [Suicide Risk Assessment Part 2: Training](#)
- Infographic: [Southeast MHHTC Suicide Risk and Assessment & Crisis Response Planning](#)
- Curated List: [Crisis Care Resources](#)

## Thinking Ahead <sup>7,8</sup>

- **Develop therapy plans** to ensure continuity of care so that there is a clear method to gauge how to best move forward depending on what the individual may be struggling with. This is also helpful so individuals know there are modalities of support in place.
- **Mitigate risk** by planning ahead and provide patients with appropriate methods and strategies to navigate triggering or difficult situations in non-offensive ways. This may include introducing positive negotiating skills to use towards individuals being harmful.
- **Develop safety plans for your client** to maintain psychological and physical well-being in the event they have individuals in their life who are abusive and will be present during the holidays. Work in tandem with them to develop safety plans to ensure that they will be able to maintain psychological and physical well-being. Connecting individuals with crisis resources such as the 988 crisis line, can be especially helpful during the holiday season.

## Additional Factors to Consider

- **Understand the various barriers** your patient may have in complying with care during the holidays. Factors such as financial stress, traveling, and busy schedules may reduce time spent in appointments.
- **It's important to be flexible** and understanding towards the patient's ability to engage in care during the holidays.



### Clinician Self-Care: Avoiding Holiday Burnout <sup>9</sup>

- **Spread out appointments:** Avoid overbooking clients to effectively manage your schedule and responsibilities amid the busy holiday season. Remember, it is okay to say “No!”
- **Engage with your support network:** The holidays are difficult for everyone. Identify and tap into your support network to navigate conflicts or challenges that might arise.
- **Maintain self-care and wellness:** – Practice self-care: go for a walk, exercise, engage in meditation and mindfulness to help mitigate stress and worry.

### SAMHSA Resources

- [988 Crisis Line](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(SPRC\)](#)

# References

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