
Coping with Holiday Stress in the Era of Covid-19

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Covid as a Mass Trauma: What We Already Know

- Trauma = an event that overwhelms our ability to cope
 - Often involves a fear of death
 - Covid presents a massive and sustained trauma
 - Many are experiencing:
 - Grief
 - Increase in anxiety
 - Insomnia/ Nightmares
 - Depression
 - You tell us!
 - How does this effect our ability to practice ethically as lawyers?
 - **Law Firms**- making payroll and retaining employees and clients, meeting billables, adapting to virtual meetings with clients and colleagues, virtual associate oversight → **amplified by TRAUMA**
 - **Solo Practice**- retaining prior/new clients, networking as a source of referrals, collections, being spread too thin, adapting to virtual court appearances → **amplified by TRAUMA**
 - **Court System**- budget cuts, hiring freeze with retirements, adapting technology to virtual court appearances, influx of cases as a symptom of the pandemic → **amplified by TRAUMA**
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COVID as a Mass Trauma: Effects Beyond our Practice, but as People in Practice

- We need **connection**; Pain feels less painful with secure attachment (Jim Coan research)
 - Without **connection**, we get anxious, depressed, low energy, and can lose a sense of purpose. During Covid quarantine/isolation, competing/contradictory needs as in-person connection is dangerous, even lethal
 - Can feel like we're choosing between safety vs. loneliness and isolation can negatively impact our ability to **communicate**
 - NY Rules of Professional Conduct rule 1.4 – Duty to **communicate** with client and **explain** matters and **consult** the client – negative impacts on communication coupled with not knowing how to **consult** the client based on a changing climate and court rules- HOW?!
 - NY Rules of Professional Conduct rule 4.2 and 4.3- communicating with represented
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What We Know?

COVID as a “Mass Trauma” amplifies

EVERYTHING

we’re already worried, anxious, & depressed about!

Holiday Stress: Leading Role

- What are the top stresses of the Holidays?
 1. Rushing to get things done/ struggling with time management
 2. Difficult family members, friends or clients
 3. Finances
 4. Exhaustion
 5. Crowds
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Holiday Stress: A Supporting Role to COVID

How is Holiday Stress AMPLIFIED by the Mass Trauma of COVID?

1. **Rushing to get things done/ struggling with time management**
 - Amplified because we don't know what will be available closer to the holidays
 - Can't prepare without knowing what/what/when will be safe or permissible
 2. **Difficult family members, friends, or clients**
 - Protecting the health of at risk family members
 - Guilt for family/friends who may be alone without putting your family at risk
 - How to deal with clients and "connect" without connecting
 3. **Finances**
 - Everyone is financially effected by COVID and therefore expectations have to be managed
 - How do we have this conversation with children?
 4. **Exhaustion**
 - Work and life balance and self-care is already a struggle- how can we be responsible partners, parents, siblings, children ourselves, grandchildren, caregivers, lawyers, advocates, volunteers AND take care of ourselves with the added stress of COVID?
 5. **Crowds**
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Time Management and Exhaustion

“a little of this, and little of that”

- **Identify your underlying feelings and fears and communicate with relevant parties**
 - Virus, infection, exposure, crowds, family gatherings, office culture, work proximity
 - Being alone/abandonment/rejection
 - Feeling controlled/loss of autonomy
 - **Consider emotional reactions that are different than yours personally and professionally**
 - Hyperarousal = panic, ruminate/obsess, plan/strategize
 - Hypoarousal = minimize, ignore, compartmentalize, distract, zone out
 - **Current crisis can trigger past traumas and difficulties**
 - based on past experiences of trauma, underlying conditions, marginalization, immigration, etc. at a nervous system level
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Friends, Family, and Children

Identify your feelings and fears

Emphasize what your friend or family member means to you

- Use "I" language
 - "I have decided..." "For my peace of mind, I need..." "For my family, I need..."
- If it feels safe enough, sharing some vulnerability can help, share your fears and feelings once you've identified them

Try to use neutral language and avoid judgment or antagonism

- "I know we're all just trying to make the best decisions we can for ourselves and our families."
"This is really hard to navigate."
- Don't argue the policies of the situation, stick to your needs because you're entitled to them

Stay firm, don't argue and give age-appropriate explanations

- Make space for kids of all ages to share their feelings, fears, and reactions
 - Validate their feelings rather than jumping to solve it or cheer them up
 - Be real with them, but let them know you understand, without alarming or overwhelming them
 - Adjust expectations for behavior - try to be gentle with them and yourself!
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The Client is Always Right

Identifying your feelings and fears includes communication with your clients

Don't "tell" your clients your office policy, ask their preference and explain how their preferences can fit your office safety policies; give them options

Remind clients not only of work that's done but the results that have been achieved; recommit yourself to the client and remind them that payments are for past work, not future work after the retainer is exhausted

Sometimes so is the Employee

Identifying your feelings and fears includes letting your employees do the

Discuss office policies with your employees ^{same} as a whole- safety isn't validated by pay grade

Option: Give employees an anonymous way to express their concerns [not their complaints]

Finances

- **Professional Honesty**

- Law firms, big or small, are faced with a very difficult task of sharing too much and scaring their employees, or sharing too little and making their employees are isolated
- Associates and administrative staff are faced with a very difficult task of sticking out a bad time and trusting their employers, or looking for other options
- The answer is- there is no answer; know your audience, and consider the following options;
- Frank conversations better for moral and transparency about holiday parties, bonuses, etc.
- Small token of appreciation vs. spending money – know your audience and you employees

- **Creative Solutions for Kids**

- Privileges
- Anyone in the audience?

- **Consignment**

- Consignment websites are not only trendy and eco-friendly but also much more affordable
- www.poshmark.com
- www.therealreal.com
- www.buffaloexchange.com [stores or online]
- www.threadup.com

● ~~Wrap gifts that are age appropriate and record the good stuff we went~~

Crowds or Being Alone

- Connection is key
 - This may require creativity!
 - Connect through phone or FaceTime
 - Watch a movie or TV show with someone on Zoom using the Share Screen feature
 - Bundle up and walk or hike together
 - Start or join a book club
 - Don't be afraid to admit - to yourself and trusted others - how you're feeling
 - Lonely is NOT a dirty word and it's not a moral shortcoming!
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Now That We've Anticipated Your Problems; Dr. Rachel Goldstein Has Your Mental Health Rx for your mind

- Consider meditation (<https://www.headspace.com> or search on YouTube)
 - Adult coloring books
 - [https://www.justcolor.net/;](https://www.justcolor.net/)
 - [https://www.crayola.com/free-coloring-pages/adult-coloring-pages/\)](https://www.crayola.com/free-coloring-pages/adult-coloring-pages/)
 - New hobbies?
 - Learn a language or instrument
 - Adjust your standards for yourself
 - Consider psychotherapy
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Now That We've Anticipated Your Problems; Dr. Rachel Goldstein Has the Mental Health Rx for your body

- **Exercise is one of the best ways to discharge negative emotions**
 - Walking, yoga, running, other online resources; and LIMIT SCREEN TIME!
 - **Eat healthy and hydrate**
 - Focus on moderation, not perfection
 - Second best way to anticipate anti-aging
 - **Sleep**
 - Consistent sleep and wake times; your circadian rhythm lends to sleep health
 - First best way to anticipate anti-aging
 - **Breathing techniques:**
 - In 4, hold 4, out 8
 - **Engage the senses**
 - Bubble baths, favorite scents, eat something flavorful without multitasking, listen to music, cooking, incense
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20 Second Hug



Mindfulness Resources

Exercise: Three Minutes of Mindfulness

First minute: Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take a couple of deep breaths to relax. During the first minute, try to simply notice your thoughts and feelings. Imagine a "bubble of awareness" that is only the size of your head and heart. What are you thinking about? What are you feeling right now in this moment? Remember, nothing outside of your frame of awareness matters right now. Give yourself permission to focus on noticing your thoughts and feelings as they occur. Once you have noticed them, do your best not to engage them, but to simply allow them to move on and leave your "bubble of awareness" on their own. Continue throughout the rest of this first minute by noticing whatever thought or feeling arises next.

Second minute: During the second minute, expand your "bubble of awareness" to include your physical sensations. As you do this, maintain your awareness of thoughts and feelings. Add your physical self to your frame of awareness and simply notice. What does it feel like to be in your body right now? What sensations do you notice? Again, just note them and then allow them to move on. Do your best to allow the sensations to move on just as easily as they first arose.

Third minute: In the final minute, again expand your "bubble of awareness," this time to include the space around you. As you do this, maintain your awareness of thoughts and feelings as well as your physical sensations. Notice the room or area around you. What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? What is it like to exist right here in this space in this very moment? Notice the stimuli of your present space and then allow them to move on from your focus. As the third minute comes to a close, bring your attention back to your breath and slowly open your eyes.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

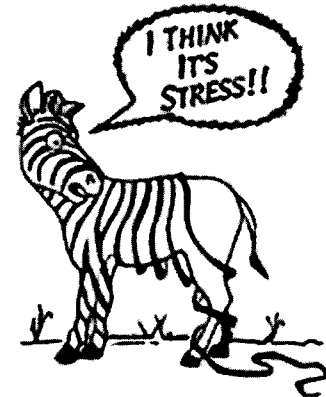
- Raise your eyebrows as high as possible for 5 seconds. This will tighten your forehead muscles.
- Relax your muscles immediately and feel the tension drop. Wait 10 seconds.
- Smile widely to create tension in your cheeks. Hold for 5 seconds. Relax.
- Pause 10 seconds.
- Squint with your eyes shut. Hold 5 seconds. Relax.
- Pause 10 seconds.
- Tilt your head slightly back so you're comfortably looking at the ceiling. Hold 5 seconds. Relax as your neck sinks back into the pillow.
- Pause 10 seconds.
- Keep moving down the rest of the body, from your triceps to chest, thighs to feet.

4-7-8 breathing

1. Let your lips part slightly and make a whooshing sound as you exhale through your mouth.
2. Then close your lips and inhale silently through your nose. Count to 4 in your head.
3. Then hold your breath for 7 seconds.
4. After, exhale (with a whoosh sound) for 8 seconds.
5. Avoid being too alert at the end of each cycle. Try to practice it mindlessly.
6. Complete this cycle for four full breaths.

Box Breathing (also called Square Breathing)

- Close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds
- Slowly exhale for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds
- Repeat



Grounding: 5-4-3-2-1 Method

- Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you.
- Start by listing five things you see
- Then four things you hear
- Then three things your body is touching as you're sitting
- Two things you can smell
- One thing you can taste.
- Make an effort to notice the little things you might not always pay attention to, such as the color of the flecks in the carpet or the hum of your computer.

For sleep: (military method)

1. Relax your entire face, including the muscles inside your mouth.
2. Drop your shoulders to release the tension and let your hands drop to the side of your body.
3. Exhale, relaxing your chest.
4. Relax your legs, thighs, and calves.
5. Clear your mind for 10 seconds by imagining a relaxing scene.
6. If this doesn't work, try saying the words "don't think" over and over for 10 seconds.

Other Resources

Headspace: meditation app offering free subscriptions for healthcare providers (need NPI)
<https://www.headspace.com/health-covid-19>

Ten Percent Happier: guided meditation for Covid-19 responders:
<https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide>
Free access to app for healthcare providers: email care@tenpercent.com

Mindfulness GIF: <https://www.mindful.org/meditation/>
Meditation: <https://www.mindful.org/a-five-minute-breathing-meditation/>

Progressive Muscle relaxation (guided YouTube video):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nZEdqcGVzo>