Make Good Mental Health Part of Your Holiday Planning

Preparing for the holidays puts extra stress on many families in the form of special activities, added errands, financial costs and disrupted routines. There are family traditions to uphold and extra cleaning to do. And there are out-of-town family members to host or trips through the woods (or in an airplane) to Grandma’s house.
As a result, we often push ourselves to accomplish a lot in a very short period of time. And then we're surprised when our physical health lags and we find ourselves feeling depressed or overwhelmed.

During the holidays, it's important to take care of both your physical and mental health. Mental health stressors can lead to physical problems, including sleeplessness, irritability or fatigue. Vince Hillyer, president and CEO of Great Circle, and a licensed clinical social worker, offers these mental health tips.

### 5 Quick Mental Health Tips for the Holidays

1. **Make time to catch your breath & relax.** We can't be our best for others when we are over-stressed ourselves. Recognize your stress points and do something to relieve them – carve out some “alone time”, read a book, call a friend, do something you enjoy. It’s a great way to recharge your batteries, plus you'll probably sleep better at night!

2. **Don't stress if something doesn't get done.** Don't have time to make your usual 5 types of cookies? Then just make two – they'll still taste wonderful. Or ask the kids to help out a little more, perhaps with the gift-wrapping. It’s okay if the corners and bows aren’t perfect. Keep the most important family traditions, but give yourself permission to put a couple on the “hiatus” this year – they'll be that much more special next year.

3. **Master the meltdown.** Kids thrive on routine, so don’t let holiday shopping or activities get in the way of naps, good nutrition or quiet time. Plan those extra holiday activities thoughtfully around what you know your child needs to have a good day – and you’ll be creating positive holiday memories for you and them, instead of meltdowns in the mall.

4. **If you need help, get it ... now.** People often put off getting counseling help until after the holidays. But don’t wait – it could help you avoid your own meltdown and it will certainly put you in a better frame of mind to handle the holidays. Great Circle’s counseling center on its Webster Groves campus could be a place to turn to for help.

5. **Do something good for others.** When we help others, our brains reward us with a shot of dopamine, which makes us feel good about ourselves and that improves our mental health. What can your family do – serve food at a homeless shelter, participate in a toy drive, help at a senior center? Or consider a donation to a special organization or perhaps Great Circle. At this time of year, Great Circle’s need is to provide special activities and gifts for the children we work with, many of whom can’t be with their families during the holidays.