

# Healthy Coping Without Substances During the Holidays

How to help college-aged youth cope without substances while navigating grief, stress, or depression.

## Supporting Grief or Loss

- Acknowledge their feelings.
- Make space for mixed emotions.
- Offer options, not pressure.
- Create a remembrance moment if it is meaningful.
- Keep communication open.

## Supporting Depression or Low Mood

- Encourage rest.
- Suggest small routines.
- Offer nonjudgmental support.
- Reduce household demands.
- Watch for persistent sadness or hopelessness.

## Supporting Youth at Risk for Substance Use

- Avoid shaming (*e.g. harsh criticism or judgment*).
- Model healthy coping.
- Offer calm, engaging alternatives.
- Check in gently.
- Reduce pressure-filled environments.



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### Reducing Holiday Triggers

- Reduce criticism and interrogating questions.
- Be mindful of identity-related stressors.
- Allow flexible participation.
- Provide a calm retreat space.
- Help set boundaries with relatives or events.

*\*Your young adult is returning home from the holidays and is readjusting to their previous schedule and rules living with you. They may feel that their freedom (e.g. curfew) has been restricted, so being understanding and flexible are key.*

### ACTIVITY

## Caregiver Reflection



Take a moment to pause and reflect on the mental well-being of your young person this holiday season. Write down one way you can support them, one boundary you can maintain, and one safe moment you can share.

### Healthy Coping Strategies to Encourage



Walks,  
stretching,  
music, art



Cooking or  
baking  
together



Mindfulness  
and grounding



Time with pets



Restful  
routines



Low-pressure  
activities

### When to Seek Additional Support

Seek mental health support for major behavior changes, withdrawal, increased substance use, hopelessness, or any mention of self-harm. *Examples may include: sleeping too little/too much, eating too little/too much, decrease in personal hygiene, etc.*

### Additional Resources

For more resources and information, scan here or visit The Steve Fund's website:



[stevelfund.org](https://www.stevelfund.org)