

Healthy Coping Without Substances During the Holidays

A quick guide for college-aged students navigating grief, stress, depression, or substance use pressures during the holidays.

When You're Feeling Grief or Loss

- **Name the feeling** and acknowledge it.
- **Create a new tradition.**
- **Step away** when conversations or gatherings feel overwhelming.
- **Connect with one safe person.**
- **Use grounding techniques** (For example, counting from 1-10, breathing exercises, use the “5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste” technique).

When You're Feeling Depressed or Low

- **Set one tiny daily goal.**
- **Maintain basic routines** (sleep, hydration, meals).
- **Engage in predictable, soothing activities.**
- **Reach out to someone.**
- **Limit contact** with people who may trigger you.

When You're Feeling the Urge to Use Substances

- **Pause for 90 seconds.**
- **Identify the trigger.**
- **Use replacement strategies** (chewing gum, stepping outside, drinking water, stretching).
- **Choose a “safe buddy”** or talk to your sponsor, mentor, or coach.
- **Plan your exit** from high-pressure environments.



Healthy Coping Without Substances During the Holidays

Navigating Stressful Holidays

- Set boundaries.
- Reduce time in **overwhelming spaces**.
- Keep a small **coping “toolbox.”**
- Give yourself permission to **leave early**.

Know When to Reach Out for Help

Reach out if you notice: persistent sadness, difficulty functioning, increased substance use, or thoughts of self-harm. *Please reach out — you are not alone. You can text STEVE to 741741 or call/text 988.*

ACTIVITY



Personal Check In

Take a moment to pause and reflect on your mental well-being this holiday season. Write down one action you can take and one person you can reach out to protect your mental health.

A Low-Stress Holiday “Toolbox”

(No Substances Needed)



Drinking
Water



Warm
Shower



Short walk or
stretching



Comfort TV or
music



Journaling



Breathing
exercises



Gratitude or
grounding



Time with
pets



Creative
hobbies

Additional Resources

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



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