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Holiday Stress

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As the holiday season approaches, many of us begin to look forward to spending time with family and friends, and to sharing in the joys of the season. However, for people who have been exposed to a traumatic event, the holiday season may bring up negative feelings. Especially at this time of year, thinking about loved ones who have died can be painful—particularly for those who have recently lost someone.

Even for people who have not been exposed to trauma, the holidays can be a stressful time. Besides the stressors of buying gifts, travel expenses and hassles, and family interactions, the short days and lack of sunlight in winter can trigger bouts of depression and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Findings from a 2008 poll on holiday stress conducted by the [American Psychological Association](#) [1], revealed that eight out of ten Americans anticipated stress during the holiday season. In the [APA's 2012 Stress in America survey](#) [2] it was found that 69 percent of Americans attribute their stress to money related concerns and 61 percent attributed stress to the economy.

To help people cope with grief, stress, and depression during the holiday season, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) offers the following resources for educators, families, and mental health professionals.

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Featured NCTSN Resources

Child Traumatic Grief

Child Traumatic Grief Educational Materials

Presents an overview of childhood traumatic grief (which may occur following a death of someone important to the child when the child perceives the experience as traumatic). Includes descriptions of normal grief and the grieving process. These materials are available for download either as a complete package (which contains information for four audiences: parents, pediatricians and nurses, school personnel, and the news media) or as individual documents:

- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Materials](#) ^[3] (2004) (PDF)
- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials—For Parents](#) ^[4](PDF) (2004) [ORDER](#) ^[5]
- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials—For Pediatricians and Pediatric Nurses](#) ^[6](PDF) (2004) [ORDER](#) ^[5]
- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials—For School Personnel](#) ^[7] (PDF) (2004) [ORDER](#) ^[5]
- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials—For Members of the News Media](#) ^[8] (PDF) (2004) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

[Coping with Unconfirmed Death: Tips for Caregivers of Children and Teens](#) ^[9] (2009) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

^[5] Offers caregivers advice on helping children deal with the complex emotions that arise when the death of family member or other important person in a child's life is suspected, but not confirmed.

[NCTSN Child Traumatic Grief Speaker Series: Holidays, Celebrations and Traumatically](#)

[Bereaved Children](#) ^[10] (2009) [LEARN](#) ^[10]

Discusses ways that holidays and other dates that are meaningful to individuals and/or the general public can serve as reminders of trauma and/or grief. Also offers ways that parents, teachers, and other adults can support children who have traumatic stress.

[Sibling Death and Childhood Traumatic Grief: Information for Families](#) ^[11] (2009) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

Provides a definition of child traumatic grief (CTG), typical grief reactions to a sibling death and losing a child, differences between grief and CTG, tips for recovery, and much more. Includes a list of age-appropriate books for children and teens who are dealing with the loss of a sibling.

[Traumatic Grief in Military Children: Information for Educators](#) ^[12](2008) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

Provides culturally competent materials for helping educators to better serve military children suffering from traumatic grief.

[Traumatic Grief in Military Children: Information for Families](#) ^[13] (2008) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

Offers guidance for families with children who have lost a loved one that was in the military.

[Traumatic Grief in Military Children: Information for Medical Providers](#) ^[14] (2008) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

Provides culturally competent materials for medical professionals about how to better serve military children who are experiencing traumatic grief.

Resources on Economic Stress

[Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Parents](#) ^[15](2011) (PDF) [ORDER](#) ^[5]

Helps parents understand how difficult financial situations can affect the entire family and offers ways to cope.

Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for School Staff—Teachers, Counselors, Administrators, Support Staff ^[16] (2011) (PDF)  ^[5]

Offers advice on dealing with difficult financial situations experienced by school personnel and students' families.

Coping in Hard Times: Fact Sheet for Youth—High School and College Age ^[17] (2011) (PDF) 

^[5]
Offers advice to teens and young adults on dealing with their parents' difficult financial situations and their own inability to find a job.

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For Educators

EducationWorld ^[18]

- Striking Out Stress: A "Gallery Walk" Activity ^[19]
Lesson plan for teachers of grades 6–12 on coping with stress and its effects. Also can be adapted for coping with holiday stress.

Gale Cengage Learning ^[20]

- Holidays: Stress on the Body ^[21]
Lesson plan for high school teachers on helping students recognize signs of holiday stress and its impact on the body.

Scholastic ^[22]

- Death and Loss: Helping Children Manage Their Grief ^[23]
Resource for teachers that explains the grieving process and provides teaching tips on how to talk with kids about loss.

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For Families

American Psychiatric Association ^[24]

- Seasonal Affective Disorder ^[25]
Defines Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD); identifies symptoms, causes, and treatment of SAD.

American Psychological Association Help Center ^[26]

^[27]

- Making the Most of the Holiday Season ^[28].
Provides tips and strategies for managing holiday stress that is primarily due to economic

stressors.

[29]

- [Tips for Parents on Managing Holiday Stress](#) [30]
Offers tips for dealing with stress due to family financial difficulties.

Cleveland Clinic [31]

- [Coping with Holiday Stress](#) [32]
Offers tips to help you minimize holiday stress.

FSEAP [33]

- [Celebrating the Holidays without Family Members](#) [34](PDF)
Newsletter that offers tips for coping with being alone for the holidays including suggestions for activities to do beforehand and ways to connect with others; also provides online resources.

Mayo Clinic [35]

- [Stress, Depression, and the Holidays: Ten Tips for Coping](#) [36]
Offers practical tips for preventing stress and depression during the holiday season.

Mental Health America [37]

- [Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\)](#) [38]
Provides facts on the prevalence, symptoms, causes, and treatment of SAD.

PsychCentral [39]

- [Coping with the Holidays](#) [40]
A series of articles with tips to help you cope with the holiday season.

Psychology Today [41]

- [5 Practical Tips To Deal With Holiday Stress: The RELAX Paradigm](#) [42]
The mnemonic RELAX describes an approach to dealing with holiday stress.
- [10 Tools for Dealing with Holiday Stress and Depression](#) [43]
Offers tools to cope with holiday blues.

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For Mental Health Professionals

Psychology Today [41]

- [Managing Stress During the Holidays: Psychologists Heal Thyself](#) [44]
Discusses how psychology can provide solutions for dealing with stress.

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- [4] http://www.nctsn.org/sites/all/modules/pubdclnt/pubdclnt.php?file=/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/parents_package1-15-04.pdf&nid=270
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- [18] <http://www.educationworld.com/>
- [19] http://www.education-world.com/a_tsl/archives/02-1/lesson045.shtml
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- [38] <http://www.nmha.org/go/sad>
- [39] <http://psychcentral.com/>
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[41] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/>

[42] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/debunking-myths-the-mind/201012/5-practical-tips-deal-holiday-stress-the-relax-paradigm>

[43] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/emotional-fitness/201112/10-tools-dealing-holiday-stress-and-depression>

[44] <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-social-self/200911/managing-stress-during-the-holidays-psychologist-heal-thyself>