

## **December: Why Are the Holidays So Stressful?**

**TIS THE SEASON TO BE** jolly – so why are so many of us unhappy during what is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year? In a word: stress. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, 38 percent of people said their stress level increases during the holidays.

### **Be Aware of Changes to Routines**

There are many potential traps during the holidays. Many of these are stressful because they happen in such overwhelming combinations only this time of year. We like our routines and rituals, and all this is a change in that.

### **Plan Ahead for Your Stressors**

We all have anxiety and stress, but what makes *you* stressed is personal. Think back to prior holidays and note which moments were the hardest. Pick your top two or three predicted stressors and have one or two action steps to help problem-solve. The key is to focus on your own behavior.

### **Remember What Makes You Happy**

As important as noting your stressors, you should also consider what brings you happiness and try hard to maximize those moments during the holidays, whether it's baking cookies or singing carols or volunteering somewhere. And be sure to maintain your own health, by getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising when you can, drinking water and finding time to listen to music, read or just relax on your own. Don't get caught up in all the endless to-do's and stressors. Go into it with an idea of what you want to get out of it, and have fun!

### **How does this relate to Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy?**

When feeling stressed, talking it out by using feeling and need statements can begin a discussion to help keep feelings from getting too overwhelming. Encouraging use of coping strategies (i.e deep breathing) and open communication about feeling and needs (i.e. I'm feeling \_\_\_\_\_ and I need \_\_\_\_\_) can help to begin the problem-solving process. Modeling these steps for others can also be very helpful.