



# reCAPS

**Counseling & Psychological Services**  
**University of California, Santa Cruz**

## Managing Holiday Challenges

With Thanksgiving around the corner and Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa not far behind, the holidays are on a lot of people's minds. Some look forward to the holidays, but for others, this time of year can be difficult. Family conflict, isolation from loved ones, religious and cultural factors (e.g., recognizing

the colonialist history of Thanksgiving, political or religious differences with family members), and problems with substance use are a few of the reasons that people may struggle.

In dealing with any difficult holiday situation, it's important to aim for good self-care: Get rest, eat well, and exercise. Self-care also includes

saying "no" to things and setting boundaries. Following are some additional tips for making your holidays happier and healthier.

### Family Problems

If you are a part of a dysfunctional family or your family doesn't accept your sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious or political views, holiday visits can be difficult. One way to deal with problematic family situations is to avoid visits.

If that isn't an option, consider ways to get extra support during time with relatives. Schedule a call or video chat with a friend or "family of choice" member and connect with supportive people through social media. Bring a friend with you to provide a "buffer" and put family on their best behavior. Participate in events with your community that provide support.

Continued on p. 2

## In This Issue

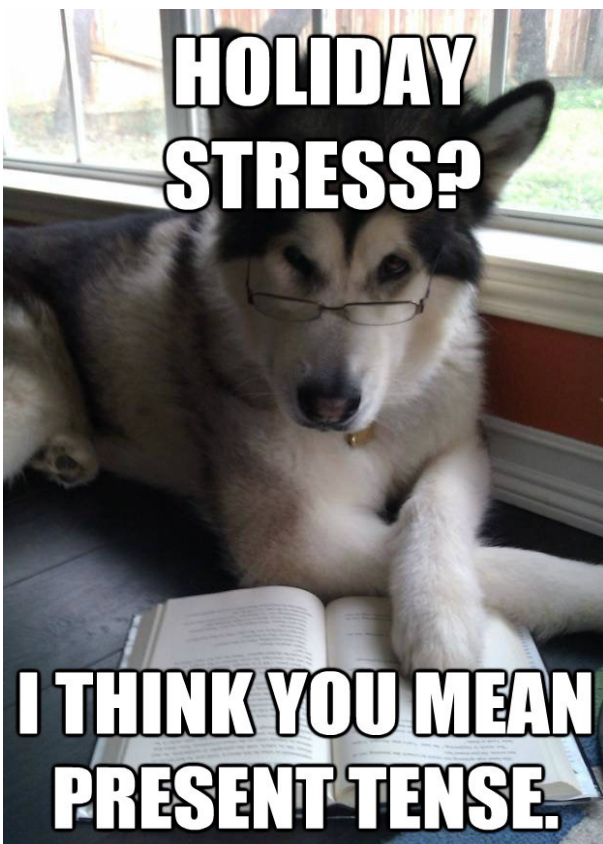
<b>Managing Holiday Challenges</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Dear CAPS: Overthinking</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Upcoming Events</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Wellness Tip: Gratitude Practice</b>	<b>4</b>

## All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health services to registered UCSC students all year:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual, couples, and family counseling
- Medication services
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Crisis services in person Mon-Fri 8 am-5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#), check out the [CAPS blog](#), and like us on [Facebook](#)!



Continued from p. 1

If you will be in a challenging family situation, try to plan some time alone or out of the house to get a break from the people and situations that cause you stress. Make a date to see friends, go for a walk, see a movie by yourself, or say you need time to study in your room or at a library. Take a long bath or say you have a headache and need to take a nap.

### Managing Holiday Loneliness

For those who can't travel home, the holidays can be lonely. Seeing other people celebrating can make it seem like you're the only one who feels alone. It's healthy to acknowledge rather than deny your feelings. But, it's also important to recognize that your perceptions about "everyone else" having a great holiday are probably not accurate. You are certainly not the only one whose holidays are not what they seem they "should" be.

Try to plan something fun for yourself to do—go on that hike or play that video game you were putting off because you were too busy. Create a new holiday ritual for yourself or with others who are staying local. It's also a great time to volunteer: Research shows that doing for others not only helps them, it can help you to feel good.

### Religion and Culture

It can be difficult knowing what to do and how to feel around the holidays when religious, cultural, and social justice issues are present. Some people have different views, beliefs, and values than their families or than mainstream society,

which can raise questions about how much or little one wants to be involved with family or societal holiday traditions.

One important thing to keep in mind is that each person can choose how and whether to celebrate a particular holiday. This may mean finding new people and communities with which to get involved for celebration, ceremony, activism, or volunteering.

### Preventing Relapse

The holidays can bring temptations and triggers for people in recovery from or struggling with substance use problems. Holiday parties can lead to a lapse in sobriety, and feeling lonely and isolated can trigger someone to try and cope by drinking or using other drugs.

It's important to be realistic about what tempts or triggers you: Plan ahead to avoid putting yourself in tempting situations or minimize the risks. For example, if going to a party may lead you to drink, make an alternative plan—go to dinner or a movie instead, or throw a sober party with other friends. You could also minimize temptation at a party by staying for a short time or taking a friend who can support you in your sobriety or moderation. If others offering you drinks is a problem, practice saying "no thanks," or

hold a cup of water or soda to discourage people from giving you alcoholic beverages.

If you are in recovery, look for meetings that are available over the holidays—especially if you are traveling and won't be able to go to your usual meetings. Keep in touch with your sponsor or other supportive people.

### Final Thoughts

Try to let go of any "shoulds" you are holding about the holidays. Although it may not be easy, you can work on changing how you view the holiday season. Take this opportunity to build gratitude for the good things you do have and to recognize things to celebrate in your life. These could be "big," like good health, the opportunity to be in college, or getting a job, or "small," such as a beautiful sunset, a text from a friend, or a smile from an acquaintance. This could be the year to create new meanings and traditions if the holidays have not been happy for you in the past.



## Dear CAPS,

*I worry a lot and overthink things.  
What can I do to change this?*

—Worrywart

We all have “unhelpful” thoughts and worries sometimes. These are different from “helpful,” or “productive,” thoughts and worries, which may help us to gain insight, plan how to change something, or recognize a pattern that no longer works. With unhelpful thoughts, our minds get stuck in a loop that snowballs until we feel worse, and we don’t solve anything. Even though it can feel like we have no control over unhelpful thoughts, we can practice techniques that will help us question, challenge, or counteract them or distract us from them. We can also learn how to self-soothe and treat ourselves with kindness and compassion.

Different techniques work better in some situations than others, and different people may prefer one strategy over another. Try some of the following, and remember, the more you practice recognizing and combatting your unhelpful thoughts, the better you’ll get at it.

### Questioning Thoughts

- Is this really true?
- Do I really believe this thought?
- Am I seeing things clearly?
- Are these the facts, or just assumptions? What is the evidence?
- Is thinking about this helpful? (e.g., Is it solving a problem, planning an action, making me feel more prepared?)
- What am I gaining from these thoughts? What am I losing?
- Is what I am worried about likely to happen?
- How else can I look at this?
- What can I do to take action?
- Will this still matter in a few months? A year? Ten years?

### De-Escalating Thoughts

- Is my thought accurate, or is it exaggerated? (Clues: When you use words like *always* and *never*, it’s probably exaggerated.)
- Can I think of examples of when this was not true?
- If the “worst-case scenario” came true, what are some ways I could try and deal with it?
- How can I focus on the present or my next steps, rather than catastrophizing about the future?
- I have coped with things in the past: What are my best tools for coping with this problem?

### Building Compassion

- Would I say this to someone I care about? If they were thinking these thoughts, what would I say to help them feel better?
- What would a good friend say to me right now?
- Even if what I am thinking is true or upsetting, can I accept that these feelings are normal?
- How can I focus on the effort I made rather than the result?
- How can I see this as a partial success or a learning experience, not as a failure?
- Instead of judging myself, can I accept that I’m not perfect?

### Choosing Your Words Carefully

- Am I using extreme, inaccurate, or emotionally loaded words (e.g., “I hate myself,” “I have nothing to live for”)? How can I reword this to be less extreme or unhelpful?
- Am I putting unrealistic expectations on myself by using unhelpful “should” statements?

### Distraction

*Note that distraction is fine as a coping tool, but it can backfire if it’s your only strategy and lead to denial and trouble facing the tough stuff. So,*

*use it in moderation, and work on building additional tools as well.*

- What can I do to take my mind off these negative thoughts (e.g., watch a video, read, run, paint, write, play sports, play video games, cook, play music, volunteer, clean, do homework)?
- Who can I talk to right now? Who can I have fun with?
- What activities might feel soothing (e.g., taking a hot shower, drinking herbal tea, getting a back rub, listening to music, being in nature, breathing deeply, doing yoga)?
- What can I do to help or support someone else instead of focusing on my own worries?

### Other Ideas

- Take a meditation class or listen to meditation or relaxation podcasts.
- Join a support group or religious/spiritual community.
- Talk to a therapist, trusted friend or relative, mentor, or religious/spiritual leader.
- Use a self-help website (e.g., [WellTrack](#) or [e-couch](#)) to work on combatting unhelpful thoughts, anxiety, and low mood.
- Practice yoga or martial arts to develop more mental focus.
- Learn to set boundaries to minimize getting into unhealthy situations with other people.
- Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to cope, as they can cause problems and prevent you from learning healthier coping skills.
- Take care of yourself by getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising—if you aren’t practicing self-care, it’ll be harder to manage anxiety and unhelpful thoughts.
- Consider signing up for CAPS’ [Anxiety Toolbox](#) or [Mindful Living](#) workshop series in winter quarter.



## Upcoming Events

**DROP-IN SUPPORT GROUP:** CAPS is providing a weekly drop-in time for UCSC students to discuss how they have been impacted by current local and national events. If you have been impacted by current events (e.g., fires in California, the shooting tragedy in Thousand Oaks, local and national racial trauma) and would like an opportunity to talk together with our counselors and other impacted students, please come to the Student Health Center Mural Room on any Friday from 12 to 1 pm during rest of the quarter: Nov. 16th, Nov. 30th, and Dec. 7th. We are here for you.

**LET'S TALK:** Let's Talk is a drop-in space where you can have a brief, confidential, one-time chat with a professional CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment—just walk in! Let's Talk is held four afternoons a week from 1 to 3 pm at different locations throughout the quarter, except holidays and finals week. All registered undergraduate and graduate UCSC students are welcome at all locations of Let's Talk. Read more on our [website](#). (Let's Talk is not set up for mental health crises—for crisis situations, visit CAPS during business hours or call (831) 459-2628 any time to talk to a crisis counselor.

**CAPS GROUPS:** CAPS is offering a variety of therapy and support groups in winter quarter. Contact CAPS now to get more information or inquire about how to sign up. Our winter quarter schedule has not been finalized, but you can see the fall schedule on our [Groups web page](#) or call us at (831) 459-2628 for more info.

**ANXIETY TOOLBOX:** This three-part workshop series gives you information and coping tools for managing anxiety and stress. Meets three times for an hour each session. Our winter quarter schedule has not been finalized, but you can read more about the series and see the fall schedule on our [website](#), or call us to get more info at (831) 459-2628.

**MINDFUL LIVING:** This is a three-part workshop series that provides an introduction to mindfulness and meditation. The skills learned in the series apply to a range of issues, including managing stress and difficult emotions. Meets three times for an hour each session. Our winter quarter schedule has not been finalized, but you can read more about the series and see the fall schedule on our [website](#), or call us to get more info at (831) 459-2628.

## Wellness Tip: Start a Gratitude Practice

Thanksgiving is a good time to reflect on things for which you are grateful. Did you know that research shows that starting a regular “gratitude practice” can improve mood and reduce anxiety? There are a few different ways to start such a practice. One of the simplest is to keep a gratitude journal, using either a paper journal or an electronic one (such as “Notes” in your smartphone). Each day (maybe when you first wake up or just before going to sleep), write down three things for which you feel grateful. They can be “big” (e.g., got an A, won an award, met a big goal) or “small” (e.g., saw a nice sunset, heard my favorite song, got a text from an old friend). The important thing is to make it a habit. Read about more ideas [here](#)!

