

## Thriving through the holidays

Welcome, everyone, to thriving through the holidays. My name is Melanie and I'm one of your moderators today along with my colleague Elana Scott. Kevin Herbert will be our guest speaker. Kevin is a senior care manager with Magellan healthcare and is a licensed counselor who has taught individuals and groups how to increase awareness, improve lives and to find peace using communication, meditation, hip gnosis and mind-body integration techniques. With that, I will turn it over to you, Kevin.

Thank you . I appreciate the introduction. Welcome, everyone, to our presentation of thriving through the holidays. As Melanie said, we will have some poll questions as we go along. Feel free to interact with those in the pool. If there's any questions we can answer I will work on having some time at the end for that. Let's go ahead and take a look at our objectives for today. We are going to talk a little bit about why holidays are more stressful than other times of the year. We are going to look at identifying our personal limits during the holidays and share some coping skills that can help you stay emotionally healthy through these times. What stresses you about the holidays? I would like to go ahead and drop that in the poll . I already see less daylight. The change in daylight savings time. Other things like that. Yeah.

I see a lot of family, Kevin. Family is stressful during the holidays when you get together with people that you aren't around all the time or maybe you don't get along with them sometimes.

Yeah. Especially, lately, we might not have that same kind of connection or we are all just a little more stressed and trying to get along. There is that uncertainty as well that comes in their

I see a lot of people talking about shopping as well. Holiday shopping or scheduling and trying to figure out how to fit everything in and keep a balance between taking care of family and work. Finances . Travel. I've seen that. There's a lot going on.

All right. We saw family. We saw finances. Overcommitment. That's a common one. We tend to stretch ourselves too far or we have a hard time saying no to requests sometimes. These are some of the more obvious ones like eating and drinking too much when we are out. Also negative emotions. We think about having vacations or holidays as a time of joy , escape or relaxation and the negative emotions don't belong in there. Getting familiar with how we feel and accepting our feelings is something we will talk about today. Let's take a look at this idea of limits and boundaries. Limits are what we are personally capable of. You might be stressed because you're concerned about what interactions you may have with the family during the holidays. Baby are concerned that you might overindulge. Maybe you have a long list of things to do and you're not sure how to get it all done. These emotions are normal. This is when it's time to understand our limits and determine healthy boundaries. It's important to remember we are not superhuman. We do all have limits and respecting those limits will help us feel more balanced, in control and at ease. Limits are determined by what we have the capacity to do before we had that metaphorical wall. For instance, you might need seven or eight hours of sleep per night to function. If you overindulge with food or drink there might be physical consequences or emotional consequences. You might feel guilty or feel like you've got an off

track from what your regular goals are. It might be that conversation with your brother-in-law about politics that sets you off. Limits can also apply to the number of resources we have. If money is tight or if there is a lot of expectation or unexpected expenses or things that come up those also play into it as well. We've got an external social limit. We've got our finances and our own personal well-being. It's good to see what other people are experiencing. Are there any limits that you might add to this?

Type in the text box at the bottom of the poll and then click on the icon to the right. That's what will broadcast your answer. We will be reading those out of the poll. What are some of your limits? I'm saying how far and willing to travel. Being overstimulated. Keeping a meticulous house. I can relate to that one. That is something I think many of us struggle with.

Even when you get it just right. It doesn't take long for some kids to turn it around.

Or dogs. They can turn it around quickly. Yeah. Holiday travel. Budget. Finances. Time management. Number of visitors at my home. That's good. Getting enough rest. Overstimulation. Sometimes we don't realize we are getting overstimulated. Yeah. Family limits as well. Setting those boundaries with different family members.

Let's talk about boundaries a little bit and what we mean by that. Boundaries are how we apply our limits to situations. For instance, making sure we tell others that we need to leave the party so we can get enough sleep at night. You can only get one day off. Scheduling time off is important. You want to make the most of that time. Another thing might be setting up a budget. We will talk about that in a little bit before starting holiday spending. Research professor at University of Houston defines healthy boundaries as simply our list of what is okay and not okay. It's essential to identify your limits and understand what healthy boundaries mean for you so that you can practice setting those boundaries during the holiday season. Take time to think about that ahead of time and ways that you can remind yourself of those boundaries and the moment to advocate for yourself. This can help you find peace and help you avoid uncomfortable situations and feelings. We talk about common holiday stressors. Consider your limits. Think about how you can use boundaries and other healthy coping skills to thrive through the holiday season. It's talk about one of the top stressors. Finances. Creating a budget. Some of us have it and some of us don't. Some dreaded and some get on it for a while and then we find ourselves drifting and not on the budget anymore. A budget is the only way that we can be accountable for what we spend. Financial author and national talkshow host Dave Ramsey says, a budget is telling your money where to go instead of wondering where it went. We are going to talk about some simple tips for creating a budget for your holiday spending. You can start by looking at how much he spent last year. Sometimes you might not know that. You can just estimate. Begin somewhere and make adjustments as you go. A lot of times your bank can provide you with an organized list that shows categories of spending during either the winter months or the whole year. You can use that as a starting point. There are websites such as Dave Ramsey's and others where you can get paperwork and things like that they can help out. You want to look at areas where you overspent and make a plan to trim that down. Some of us want to jump to totally eliminating one thing or the other. Again, coming up with an approximation and seeing what works is a part of telling Rick your money where to and not wondering where it went. It's better than the alternative. You can make a list of purchases and

events where you plan to spend money and consider all your major spending categories. Gifts, entertainment, meals, travel and then estimate how much you can spend in each category. Be sure you've got a plan for how you'll pay for what you buy. If you are putting it on a credit card where will those funds come from to pay the bill? You can track your spending throughout and then you can revisit your budget to make sure that you're keeping on track and another helpful piece is an accountability partner. Somebody that can help you stick to your plan. Ensure the person you pick is willing to be honest with you and not just tell you what you want to hear. This is a crucial step in reaching our goals. Any of the things we can do to care for ourselves is improved by having a committed accountability partner or somebody who can increase our level of commitment. The next thing here we have is making a list. We can make a list for which you plan to buy gifts and then establish a plan within those limits. Consider fun and economical options. Things were tight and I wanted to enjoy and share that joy with my family we found simple adventures. Staycations and things like that. Things you can create. Things were the balance of meaning and awfulness outweighs the cost. It's tough when you're overcommitted. It can be very difficult to say no and match the reality with your radio. Be a savvy shopper. This is a simple tip but often overlooked as we are all busy. Taking time to research before spending can certainly save you some money and keep you within budget. Look for special savings days at your favorite stores. There's a lot of competition right now between Amazon and Walmarts of the world to get your dollars and within reason that can be something where you find a middle ground. You can also take advantage of free shipping offers. There are apps and websites that apply coupons or get you discounts after the fact. Next, take your gift list and determine where to make your purchases based on the deals you've collected. It's kind of that same strategy of don't go to the grocery store hungry. You want to know what you're getting and you go in and get it and get back out before you do too much damage. How about overcommitment? What can we do when there are so many demands? Setting some priorities. Being overcommitted and overstressed is almost a given during the holidays. What can we do to get ahead of that? What can we do in the thick of it? For priorities, what are the circumstances surrounding your holidays? Do you have work schedules? Travel plans? Are there yearly traditions? Visiting relatives? Party invitations? Prioritize what's most important to you and make your plans accordingly. After going through this pandemic we have all learned to be flexible and how we interact. We might not always be great and have it all together but that doesn't mean that connection isn't important. There are other things we can do to find multiple ways to connect. Is it possible that we can gather over video, phone or in person? We can use the medium that we have to increase the meaning of the experience. Our second piece here is learning to say no. You owe it to yourself to know your limit, set healthy boundaries and stand by them. We talked about this in the earlier slides. Your ability to say no and set limits are going to be essential for navigating the holidays. Don't be afraid to use this word to keep those holiday commitments and obligations at a manageable level. You can say no to hosting events. You can say no to attending one more party. You can say no to going several places in a day or adding those extra gifts to buy or traveling long distances. This is a part of that healthy boundary setting and good self-care. Back to this idea of, what are we doing it for? To add meaning and have fun. To connect with our loved ones. Remember the fun. Hopefully as you set your priorities for the holidays that is the focus and that's where the enjoyment is. If there's something you can't change or do something about you put it aside for the time being. If there

is something unexpected you find a way to roll with it and sorted out as you go along. There may be times where we choose less enjoyable commitments. We might have to do something as a compromise with somebody in our family, or whatever it might be. Balance those with fun and joyful activities. If you have something you have to do or you would rather not do have a balance of something that you're doing for yourself. Something you're doing that will balance out that joy. In every situation there is something fun and enriching we can focus on. If you examine your holiday plan you find that the fun is missing then it is time to re-examine that. All right. Let's talk about relationships and family. That's another one we saw in the poll. Some things we can control and other things we cannot. People are on that list of things we often cannot make or do exactly what we would like them to do and we want to look for the ones we know that's on her side of the ones that help us recharge our batteries and make sure there is a balance of this people and that we are connecting with them so we can do with some of the other ones where our ability to maintain an interaction is more strained. For many of us one of the biggest threats to holiday enjoyment is that extended time and or communication we spend with friends and family. Some of these people we only communicate with during special holidays. What can we do to manage relationships so that you can have some fun? Set realistic expectations. Ask yourself some critical questions. Is it realistic to agree to spend extended time with a toxic relative or somebody that is difficult for you to go along with? There may be some other thing that you can do to manage if you've got somebody like that that you are not looking forward to interacting with. If you're uncomfortable with your relatives behavior or maybe they are drinking excessively or outspoken political or social views or the things they say and do tend to stir up emotions for yourself and others. Should you agree to spend time with them without an exit strategy? What can we do? With family boundaries and relationship boundaries let's determine what those are and stick with them. If you've got a planned holiday event gather the details. What's the plan? What's the plan that works best for your emotional health and stress level? Maybe you agree to show up for the appetizer portion of the event before this relative shows up or before a lot of drinking has occurred? Except that others may not understand or agree with your decision but your health, safety and values are important. If you feel uncomfortable attending an event because it conflicts with these it's okay to decline. Expressing expectations ahead of time is also a critical step. You might ask friends or family who feel ill or exposed to someone who has been ill to join virtually. Run your plan by them if you are looking to change your level of interaction there. You can also consider addressing unresolved conflicts. If there's an unresolved conflict and you know you will see this person over the holidays reach out in advance and attempt to resolve it. There's a lot of reasons why conflicts go unresolved and why we might procrastinate selling something with someone. Sometimes it's a worry and anxiety. You have to ask yourself, is it more threatening now or is it going to be a problem if I don't do something in that situation for the gathering? If it's reasonable to reach out to somebody in advance go ahead and do that. If you can fix the matter and the holidays have a high potential for triggering family issues consider speaking with a mental health the sessional or your employee assistance program. We have people you can talk to about anything. We can talk to you in the moment and get settled or get you connected with somebody that you can meet with on an ongoing basis. I would encourage you to use that benefit. Talk through your issues can my feelings and concerns. You can also make practical decisions about how you'll spend your holidays, who you will spend

them with and EAP can be a great place to start. If there's something we can do to help you get ideas about money or other aspects of your work-life balance we will discuss how you can access those things at the end of the presentation. Is it rude to ask someone showing signs of illness to put on a mask? I think it's less unexpected than perhaps it was since the pandemic. These are things we are familiar with now. The chance that there is a mask available where there is something is wide likely, now than ever, then if somebody is ill and you bring that to their attention there may be a small percentage of people that would consider that to be rude to ask but I think more people would appreciate the honesty, especially if it was a tactful request. Another thing we can do is accept others differences. We can accept family members and friends as they are even if they don't live up to your expectations. Even if you chalk it up to I won't see them again for another 12 months. We can avoid using the holidays to confront. We can practice understanding when others appear upset or distressed. They are likely feeling the stress of the holidays as well. Anytime we can feel empathy for others we are less likely to harbor negative or toxic thoughts that lead to upset feelings and conflict. There are some things we can do for that and we will talk about that in a little bit. If you're communicating more by phone or text these are great ways to get information, to stay connected, but there is a lot that can be lost in translation with our sentiments and emotions. The same thing I would share with folks that are finding themselves and conflict is the same thing I would share with somebody who is in an unusual or out of the ordinary situation. Keep it simple. Focus on one thing at a time. Especially with text and email. Don't get caught up in multiple subjects. Keep it focused and keep it short. You can also step back for a moment and gain some perspective. You can show what you're about to send or write to somebody and see how they hear it when they see it on the page. It's a stressful time for many of us. A little bit of grace and giving that grace to another can be the best gift of all. What else has worked for you will as far as relating to dealing with relationships during the holidays? We've got a number of people here and you've all got your own personal experience and great ideas. What works for you?

Feel free to put your answer in the text box at the bottom. Once you've done that, click that icon to the right. What other ideas have worked for you related to dealing with relationships during the holidays? People are saying have fun. Meditation. Just have fun as an attitude.

That's right.

Try to keep it minimal. Avoid trigger topics with people that might set something off. Having an open mind and being grateful for what you have. Going out for walks. Taking a break.

Some of the themes we are seeing here are caring for yourself. Knowing ahead of time what your methods are. We also saw making it more meaningful. Things you can do to make it more positive. We sought empathy. Put yourself in somebody else's shoes. An important thing to remember is that it is time-limited. We always have this opportunity to weigh our desire to have things our way with our desire to build relationships. Even with the most difficult folks there is an opportunity to find a way that builds relationships without downplaying our values and importance in the things that are important to us.

I do want to mention there are a few people that talked about humor. Keeping your sense of humor.

That's my goatee.

It's really helpful in these situations.

Definitely. Sort of a personal aspect of embracing the unexpected. Looking for it and connecting it to something odd. Anytime somebody says something that I don't have a bunch of data about or I don't have a whole lot of information on I just think, that's weird. I don't say it but I think it. It's like I've got this file cabinet inside of my mind and there's a folder in there called weird. I take whatever they said and I put it in the folder. Later on maybe I want to check some facts or later on I wonder if that person is doing okay. Whatever it is, it's not saying no that is dumb or no I don't agree with that. It's okay. You put it in the folder and put it aside and get back to the focus which is having fun, building relationships and doing something meaningful.

I love that tip. I'm going to use that. A great way to diffuse when somebody says something. Just put it in the weird folder.

Thank you so much. You guys had such great ideas there. Definitely being okay with not attending as acceptable. Let's take a look here. When our courage lapses and our desire to stay on track is put aside for the moment it's for the moment. If you've got a solid plan and you are planning and thinking about how to care for yourself and what you want to see happen to yourself that's okay. I work with people who relapse and have problems sticking to the plan or doing what's best for them and that's not the end of it. It's a given. You should expect to fail and know that failure is a signal to keep moving forward. To doubled down on what you are attempting to do for yourself and learn from that to keep going. What can we do? We want to try that delicious sweet potato pie. We want the cookies or whatever it might be. We want to have a few more drinks than we normally do. What are you going to duke it counterbalance it? Exercise. Not in the sense you can burn off those calories but exercise is actually a D stressor. The more we do it and the more we access it the more we remember that. The further we get away from it the more we might dread the possibility of expending the energy. Exercise really is a great distress her. It's preventative to weight gain and elevates your energy levels and mood. It releases dopamine and serotonin and you don't have to go to the gym. Just a 15 minute risk walk can really make the difference. I went out and just walked on my own last night. I felt really good that I went ahead and did that. You can break up your time into shorter sessions. You don't have to get all 150 minutes of the prescribed exercise in a week in the first two hours of the day. This is an important one, especially if you have issues with eating. Mindfulness. Awareness. I'm guilty of this myself. You see the smorgasbord of delicious experiences awaiting you and you try to figure out how to fit it all into one plate. It's still going to be there when you're done with that plate. Just remind yourself of that. You can go back up if you want or need to. While you have that plate, rain and your focus. Find a place to sit down. Get comfortable. Really enjoy it. Enjoy each bite. You're not just there talking and watching. You are savoring. Focus on your eating. Enjoy the food. Pace yourself. When we eat quickly our digestive system doesn't alert us to fullness for 15 or 20 minutes. It's easy to over eat and miss the signs. Once you're done eating take your focus and move it away from the food and put it on other activities. Visit with friends, watch a movie that way you're also creating boundaries. You can think about the things that you do as taking control of your own

time and space. This is what I'm going to do in this place during this time. Instead of trying to do it all at once. One thing at a time. Use caution with beverages. Alcohol and other things can lessen inhibitions. It might induce overeating. Other drinks that you might not drink a lot like sodas and juices or even the nonalcoholic mixers. Those are full of calories and sugar. You might alternate water or tea with lemon between the other drinks you're having. As with other goals it helps if you can find someone to be accountable during this time. I saw someone mention that a little while ago. Definitely accountability partner. A buddy or somebody can help you stay on track and get back on track during the stressful time year. Let's talk about the emotions that come into play and what we can do about that. There are some things we can do from a practical aspect we talked about that allow you to establish control of what you have control over. When we don't have control or a choice or we start to get overwhelmed then we don't change the situation. We change our response to the situation. This is something we can do. What are some reasons why people experience negative emotions over the holidays? What would you share with us for that?

Some answers coming in. Loss of family members. Grief. Family pressures. A good amount of people are talking about loss, for sure.

That's understandable. The holidays, whether anniversaries, birthdays or the end-of-the-year or those things they remind us of those who are not joining us. That can bring back her feelings of loss. It can also open up things we try to suppress or keep down. With the pandemic there have been a lot more losses. Multiple losses in the boiler of grieving those is ready to emerge. When we find ourselves in a new situation when we find yourselves talking to people we don't see very often. How do we handle the grief aspect of it? That's actually the topic of my talk next December and that is grief ahead of the holidays. One of the things we can do is look at what triggers that. We've got some practical strategies you can try or encourage a coworker or loved one to try. We can't always take the sadness away but we can do things to lessen the pain and prevent worsening of symptoms. I mentioned this before that negative emotions are just as important as all the other emotions we have. The reason we have the emotions we do is because they help us survive. There's really only one positive emotion out of eight universal emotions and that's joy. The other one that's not negative is surprise. The other ones are negative. That's because it encourages us to take charge of our survival and do what's best for us. We get angry about something because something has gotten in the way of us getting what we need. If we are sad because something that matters to us is unacceptable. The holidays are, perhaps, the best time to have a conversation. If we are grieving it's because we loved and we have a love story to tell. Maybe you've already told it to your family or friends that you see regularly. Maybe you have an opportunity to test tell the story again if you feel comfortable doing that. Embrace the idea. The emotions you feel are okay. You can explore that and step back. You have a right to feel how you feel. That leads us into this idea of practicing radical acceptance. Accepting life on life's terms and not resisting what you can't control. It's about saying yes to life, really. Just as it is. The holidays can trigger mixed feelings. We might want to suppress those feelings. We might discount them or tell ourselves we should be over that by now. Instead of fighting those feelings we focus on acceptance. Try to accept everything about yourself, your current situation and your life without question, blame or judgment. When unpleasant thoughts pop up like this isn't fair, I can't take this, it shouldn't be this way take a

different approach. Turn your resistant ruminating into accepting thoughts like I'm in this situation. I don't approve of what's happening. I don't like it but it is what it is. I can't change what happened. You can develop a mantra to help with that. Think ahead of time. What are you going to say? That's weird. Oh. Oh well. It is what it is. If you've got spiritual beliefs infuse what matters to you into your statement. The goal is accepting yourself. Yourself is not just thoughts in your head or where your heart sits. It's you in the space that you occupy being who you are uniquely capable of being. That includes the good and the bad. The sad and the glad. Facing those circumstances. Accept yourself through it all and it will help you move there and pass them. Another helpful practice is mindfulness. I've given many talks on this in the past and it's something that is really helpful to me and my clients. Knowing what it is and what its limits are are helpful. The idea is our ability to focus on the here and now. We might find ourselves living in the past. We might find ourselves constantly worrying about the future. Those places, while important, are not the real place right in front of you. One of my favorite mindfulness teachers says you have an appointment with life. The only place you're going to meet that appointment is in the now. The present moment. It's okay to visit the past. Just don't live there. It's okay to be wary of what's ahead of us but it doesn't help to worry about things that we don't have control over. We're trying to figure out, what can I actively do that will address the situation or position me to arrive at my future in a more positive way? Sometimes it's as simple as focusing on the present moment. Keeping it simple. By becoming aware of what we are sensing or feeling in the moment without analyzing or judging it we let it be. We don't tell it that it is one thing or the other. If my heart is beating fast because I meeting somebody new or have it someone in a while there's so many different emotions that correlate to an extended heartbeat. Excitement. Anticipation. Joy. It doesn't just have to be dread. It doesn't have to be I'm feeling anxious and this is going to get bad. My heart is beating faster. I hear you. Put your hand on your chest and feel that beat. Say, I'm listening. Breathe into that. Tell yourself this is okay and it's getting better. There's a lot of ways to practice mindfulness. There's guided breathing. Our body is managing all of these systems for us and it does it automatically. We don't have to blink. We don't have to beat our heart. The one thing we do have control over is our breathing. We can work backwards by controlling our breath and then that changes these other involuntary systems to fall in line. There's another great technique that I use when nervousness is coming on or you know you're in this amped up state and its to slowly drink a glass of water. That fools your system into switching into that relaxation response. All right. You want to practice doing this ahead of time. If you can spend five or 10 minutes just stopping for a moment and be in the present moment it pays such wonderful benefits. Another thing is self compassion. Be kind and understanding towards yourself when suffering or feeling inadequate. You can ignore that pain. You can beat yourself up with criticism or you can treat yourself how you would treat someone that you love and care about. Practicing self compassion increases our resilience to get through tough situations and reduces our stressful responses. You might say, it's self-pity. Self compassion is an antidote to self-pity. Self-pity says, poor me. Self compassion recognizes life is hard for everyone. Studies show that self compassionate people are more likely to be able to put difficult situations into perspective rather than focusing on the distress. They are less likely to ruminate are overly focused on how terrible things are. That's one of the reasons self compassionate people have better mental health. You can use guided meditation or self compassion exercises to develop the practice of



caring for yourself. You can keep a self compassion Journal or write a letter to yourself to express your feelings. Write it from the perspective of a treasured friend or loved one. Imagine how that person would respond to you with all of that love and care and empathy that you need. You can also write a letter about how you would react to somebody going through the same situation. Take little breaks. A little self compassion break and ask yourself what you need. Allow yourself that moment, even if you can't find an answer. You attempted to communicate with yourself. Definitely rely on a support system. Connect with the people who support you and try to build that network. Build relationships. Reach out to your doctor or mental health professional. Contact her EAP. We have information on how to do that. Consider how you're going to use the information that you learned today. What will you do differently this year? Before you're onto the next thing write down a few of the skills that you'll use to thrive during the upcoming holidays. I'm not sure where we are in time but I'm going to turn it over to Melanie. If we have time for questions I'll be happy to answer.

Thank you. We are at the end of our time today. I want to remind you that your benefit is here for you. We don't have everyone's toll-free number today because we have people from all across the country from different companies that are on this call. If you are interested in reaching out to your program please call or reach out to your manager, supervisor or HR department. They will know that you have this benefit available to you. It's free of charge and the beautiful thing about your program is it's not just for problems but it's all kinds of things. If you want to look up information about how to deal with your finances during the holidays there is information on our website for that. Again, please reach out to either your leadership or someone in your benefits department and ask them for your programs. Those are the two places you can get more information. We didn't have time to get to your questions today but we would love to answer those if you call in. There are going to be people on the phone that can direct you in whatever way you need to go. I do want to ask you to please fill out our poll question. It states how overall satisfied you are with today's webinar. The answers are very satisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. You can click on the button next to your response that will broadcast your vote to us. We are not broadcasting to everyone. There's also a certificate of completion here. Feel free to download that. If you hover over it and click the download arrow that will download it to your computer. Remember where you save it so that you can go back and retrieve it. I want to thank everyone, once again, for attending today. This does and our webinar. Think you so much for speaking today, Kevin. We appreciate you.

My pleasure.

Have a good rest of your day, everyone. Thank you. [Event Concluded]