



# It's Up to Us<sup>®</sup>

to Create a Healthy & Supportive San Diego

A special bulletin covering mental health topics for San Diegans



Edition 33

## About the Campaign

Today, like all Americans, San Diegans are faced with reentering society after almost two years of heightened isolation, fears, stressors, and levels of fatigue. During COVID-19, extended periods of social distancing and ensuing health and economic disparities caused many of us to face new mental health challenges.

San Diegans found ways to support each other as a community to create a safe and successful reopening. However, as we move forward many of the mental health challenges we faced during COVID-19 remain.

The It's Up to Us campaign is working hard to encourage conversations about mental health. It's Up to Us provides guidance on how and when to offer support for those in need, as well as how to reach out for support yourself.

By raising awareness, encouraging dialogue, and providing access to local resources, It's Up to Us aims to inspire wellness, reduce stigma, and prevent suicide in all San Diegans, with a particular emphasis on San Diego's most at-risk populations.

This campaign is developed through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* vision to promote a community that is healthy, safe, and thriving.

**Up2SD.org<sup>®</sup>**  
LINK UP FOR INFORMATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Access & Crisis Line  
**(888) 724-7240**

COMMUNITY RESOURCES 2-1-1



## Protecting Your Mental Health During the Holidays

The holidays are a time when many reflect on the past year and make plans to take time off or celebrate with family and friends. Getting together this season can be exciting, but it can also come with stress and mental health challenges. Holiday plans often result in busier schedules and spending more money, which can be mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausting. In fact, almost two thirds of those who face mental health challenges report feeling worse during the holidays.<sup>1</sup> Plus, traveling safely and indoor gatherings can cause anxiety even with more individuals fully vaccinated.

As expectations can be high during this brief period of time, it's important to remember what really counts. You may not be able to control what happens around you, but you can change how you respond to situations. If you have a moment of frustration, try to focus on cherishing the quality time you are spending with loved ones.

With all the celebrations happening, there may be pressure to take part in every event. But being kind to yourself and taking a moment to be alone can be an effective way to overcome a hurdle and protect your mental health if you feel overwhelmed. During a time where so much effort can be put into helping others, we must not forget the importance of taking care of ourselves.



<sup>1</sup>National Alliance on Mental Health. (2014, November 19) Mental health and the holiday blues [Press Release]. <https://www.nami.org/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2014/Mental-health-and-the-holiday-blues>

**Did You Know?** The holidays are actually a wonderful time to practice self-care.

## Read Up: Sources of Stress During the Holidays and How to Cope

### Pressure to Have “Holiday Cheer”

With the holidays expected to be “the most wonderful time of the year,” you may feel pressure to be cheerful. Remember that no holiday celebration is perfect. If you are feeling down or stressed, know that you are not alone.

### Feeling Grief and Loss

For many, the holidays are a time to visit or check in with family and friends, but it’s important to remember that for those who have lost loved ones it can be a painful reminder of their absence. It’s okay to grieve and acknowledge your emotions rather than hide them. However, if you find yourself turning to substances to cope, you may be making these feelings worse. In fact, alcohol use has been linked to depression, anxiety, and other challenges that can negatively impact your mental health.<sup>2</sup>

### Holiday Financial Stress

The holiday season often involves an increase in spending and, with the economic impact of COVID-19, it may feel even more stressful. While you may feel pressured to spend money, it’s important to remember that material objects are not the only kind of gift. Consider making a thoughtful gesture or spending quality time with loved ones over a home cooked meal rather than spending money on a present or going out.

### Sensitive Conversations with Family

The end of the year is a time to catch up and reflect with loved ones, but conversations around the table can sometimes get uncomfortable or heated. Accept your needs and boundaries. It’s okay to remove yourself from activating situations or say “no” to plans if they don’t feel right for you.

### LGBTQ+ Teens and Youth

This season can be a stressful time for LGBTQ+ community members and teens who may not be out to their families or have families who are not supportive. Feelings of stigma and rejection can be overwhelming. Stay connected to your support network, and if you know an LGBTQ+ teen, the holiday season may be a helpful time to reach out. Find support through the [Trevor Project](#) or connect to local resources like the [San Diego LGBT Community Center](#).

### Remote Work Challenges

Remote work has allowed many people to safely continue their jobs throughout the pandemic, but has also made it difficult to define when the workday begins and ends. While some people may not be able to fully unplug from work, there are steps you can take to minimize stress on your time off. Make a plan for which emails or work projects you can completely disconnect from, or turn off device notifications to have fewer reminders of work. Limit non-urgent messages or calls to reduce stress and allow for more focused time with friends and family.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, March 19). Alcohol and substance use. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping/alcohol-use.html>

## Self-Care and How to Flourish This Holiday Season

The holidays can be challenging, and with the spirit of giving it can be easy to put yourself on the back burner. Don’t forget to take a step back, disconnect, and practice self-care if you need to recharge.



### Try These Self-Care Activities

**Mental:** These strategies stimulate your mind or give it a chance to rest. This will allow for learning and growth.

- Solve a puzzle or play a game with friends
- Listen to music
- Disconnect from social media



**Emotional:** Bringing peace to our inner thoughts can reduce stress and anxiety, lead to a better understanding of ourselves, and create greater compassion toward ourselves and others.

- Practice self-reflection
- Say “no” to set healthy boundaries; take the time you need to be alone and reflect
- Use positive affirmations to overcome negative thoughts: Remind yourself you are worthy, you are strong, and that you are doing your best



**Physical:** These practices address your fitness, eating, and sleeping habits, as well as overall physical health. Taking care of your body will boost your self-esteem and help you and your family flourish at home.

- Get in 30 minutes of movement daily, even walking outdoors with a friend counts
- Eat nutritious foods
- Get a restful and full night’s sleep



**Spiritual:** Spiritual self-care can help you and your family find more meaning in life and discover a sense of purpose.

- Spend time in nature
- Practice religion or spirituality
- Meditate
- Practice yoga



## Shine a Light On: Checking In on Older Adults During the Holidays

Older adults are at higher risk for loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to live alone, experience the loss of family or friends, or have chronic illness and sensory impairments.<sup>3</sup> And recent studies show that 35% of adults over the age of 45 in the U.S. reported feeling lonely.<sup>4</sup>

This season, make a point to give your older loved ones and neighbors a call, either just to check in or to remind them how much you care. If you visit and they live alone, it could be a good time to take note of their health. Things like limited mobility could lead to a fall with further consequences, so keeping a watchful eye could be a helpful preventative measure.

Help them continue observing beloved holidays. Certain traditions, such as decorating, can become increasingly more challenging with age. Consider lending a hand to help them keep up with the holidays they enjoy and care about. Even sharing a small gift like a favorite treat or seasonal decoration can help remind them they're in your thoughts.



<sup>3</sup>National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). Social isolation and loneliness in older adults: Opportunities for the health care system [White paper]. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>

<sup>4</sup>Anderson, G. Oscar and Colette E. Thayer. Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older. Washington, DC: AARP Research, September 2018. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00246.001>

## If You're Worried Someone May Be Thinking of Suicide, It's Up to Us Can Offer Resources

Asking a loved one if they are thinking about suicide is never an easy thing to do. What if you are wrong? Or what if they say yes? Know that trusting your instincts and asking the question is absolutely the right thing to do.

A resource called Know the Signs can help you navigate difficult situations: [www.suicideispreventable.org](http://www.suicideispreventable.org). This California suicide prevention campaign can help parents, family, or friends recognize the warning signs of suicide, as well as learn how to have a powerful conversation with someone in crisis. They also can help direct you to additional professional help or resources depending on your specific needs.

If you think you or a loved one needs more immediate help, the San Diego Access & Crisis Line (888) 724-7240 is also available 24/7 and is staffed by trained counselors who are skilled in intervening with those who are having thoughts of suicide, as well as individuals who are concerned about someone else.

### When is dialing 9-1-1 the right call?

If you suspect that someone is about to harm or has already harmed themselves and requires medical attention, or if you are in danger, this is the right thing to do. Calling 9-1-1 can connect the situation to first responders, such as law enforcement, firefighters, and EMTs.

### What steps can I take to help prevent suicide?

**Know the Signs:** Pain isn't always obvious, but most people with thoughts of suicide show some signs that they are thinking about suicide. If you observe warning signs of suicide such as feelings of hopelessness or talk of wanting to die, step in or speak up.

**Find the Words:** "Are you thinking of ending your life?" Few phrases are as difficult to say to a friend or loved one. But when it comes to suicide prevention, none are more important. Begin the conversation, then be willing to listen.

**Reach Out:** You are not alone in helping someone in crisis. There are many resources available to assess, treat, intervene, and to reduce access to lethal means.

The more we talk about suicide and suicide prevention, the more we can reduce the stigma around the subject and infuse our community with hope and healing.

Visit [Up2SD.org](http://Up2SD.org) for a list of warning signs, conversation starters, and local resources. See why you're the right person to start a conversation: [why-you.up2sd.org](http://why-you.up2sd.org)

## SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

While the holiday season may be a time of joy for some, others can find themselves facing heightened mental health challenges. It's important to understand why they may be thinking of ending their life. The signs below may mean someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if the behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

### Warning Signs

- ▶ Talking about wanting to die
- ▶ Looking for a way to end one's life
- ▶ Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- ▶ Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- ▶ Talking about being a burden to others
- ▶ Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- ▶ Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless
- ▶ Sleeping too little or too much
- ▶ Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- ▶ Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- ▶ Displaying extreme mood swings

### What to Do

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

- ▶ Do not leave the person alone
- ▶ Remove any firearms, drugs, alcohol, or sharp objects that could be used in an attempt
- ▶ For life-threatening emergencies or immediate response, call 9-1-1
- ▶ For urgent and other concerns, contact the Access & Crisis Line at (888) 724-7240

# First Responders and the Holiday Season

Even during the holiday season, First Responders continue to work around the clock to keep us safe. They could be missing out on their favorite holiday traditions with loved ones and family. Their repeated exposure to trauma on the job can put them at greater risk for experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. And even though the last two years have been especially challenging due to COVID-19, First Responders still may be hesitant to seek help. A University of Phoenix online survey found that 57% of First Responders avoid seeking help for fear of repercussions at their job.<sup>5</sup> But there is hope. Many employers are working to address and reduce these fears. There are also actions you can take to help. If you know a First Responder, consider sharing your gratitude or showing your appreciation. For resources made just for First Responders including peer to peer support, please visit [SDFirstRespondersProgram.org](https://SDFirstRespondersProgram.org) or call the hotline at 1-833-YU-FIRST.



<sup>5</sup>University of Phoenix. (2019, September 11) University of Phoenix Survey Finds More Than Half of First Responders Feel There Are Job Repercussions For Seeking Professional Mental Health Counseling [Press Release]. <https://www.phoenix.edu/media-center/press-release/university-of-phoenix-survey-finds-more-than-half-of-first-responders-feel-there-are-job-repercussions-for-seeking-professional-mental-health-counseling.html>



## NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE?

Unsure of where to go for help? Chat online or call a counselor today!

### SAN DIEGO ACCESS & CRISIS LINE

- Free confidential support
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention
- Referrals for mental health and drug and alcohol needs

- All languages
- 7 days a week / 24 hours a day

(888) 724-7240



### LIVE CHAT

- Chat with a counselor today!
- Available Mon–Fri 4–10 p.m.

Visit: [OptumHealthSanDiego.com](https://OptumHealthSanDiego.com)

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES DIAL 2-1-1

