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Each year I try to send out some healthy advice for the holiday season. This year I am sending some sensible recommendations from Julie Barton. At the end of the newsletter, there is a cartoon that particularly speaks to me about finding ways to help others.

How to Have a Healthy & Happy Holiday Season

Holiday music is playing on the airwaves and decorations adorn stores and streets in the neighborhood. After your kids deplete their Halloween candy stash they start counting down the days until winter break! The frenzy of holiday shopping is ignited. You can feel the festive energy everywhere and at the same time you may be feeling something else—STRESS. While the holidays are often filled with tremendous joy, many parents find themselves overwhelmed and anxious as extra demands and expectations are piled onto their already full plates. Here are some tools to help make the next two months not only survivable but also enjoyable for you and your family:

Start with the basics: Eat Well. Sleep Enough. Move Your Body.

Here's your guide to a happy and healthy holiday season this year. As any parent knows, these three elements may sound "basic" but they are often parent's biggest challenges.

- Moderation is your mantral! Do your best to make healthy choices with food and beverages while allowing yourself to enjoy the wonderful flavors of the holiday season.
- While it is wonderful to enjoy the occasional late-night holiday gatherings as most parents discover, we usually pay the price the next day. So, for everyone's sake, set reasonable bedtimes for the entire family during holiday break.
- Take a 20-minute walk a few times a week during your lunch hour at work, or when your partner or friend can watch the kids. Engage in movement-based, fun activities with your family like skating or snow showing (in cold climates), or family football games in warm climates. P.S. this is great to incorporate regularly.

Set healthy boundaries and love yourself.

Whether it is the cousin who never leaves, the great uncle that makes inappropriate comments at the dinner table, or the fact that you run around like a crazy person doing all the holiday shopping and preparations, most of us have to deal with some difficult situations/family dynamics during the holidays.

A great way to diffuse potentially stressful situations is to discuss potential family stressors with your partner beforehand and try to establish some agreed-upon management strategies.

- What will you (or your partner) say to a family member who can't take the hint that the party is over and you need to get the kids to bed, or how will you or your partner change the subject if a discussion starts to head in an uncomfortable direction?
- Determine how much time you going to spend at grandma's house on New Year's day (or agree that you will take two cars).
- Allow yourself to say "no" to holiday gatherings that are certain to cause you undue stress.
- Divide and conquer. Divide up the holiday shopping, gift wrapping, holiday card addressing and meal preparations with your partner. If you are single, let the kids or a family member help you. It is too overwhelming to go at this alone. Decrease your stress and increase your joy by asking for (and then accepting) the help you need.

Find gratitude and joy while honoring your feelings.

The holidays can evoke so many conflicting emotions. While we recognize the joy and happiness around us, and remind ourselves and our children of all we have to be grateful for, oftentimes we are reminded of the pain of losing

loved ones or seeing friends and family members struggle with challenges. Not only is this all okay, but the holidays can become even more meaningful when we embrace gratitude, joy and the memories of loved ones.

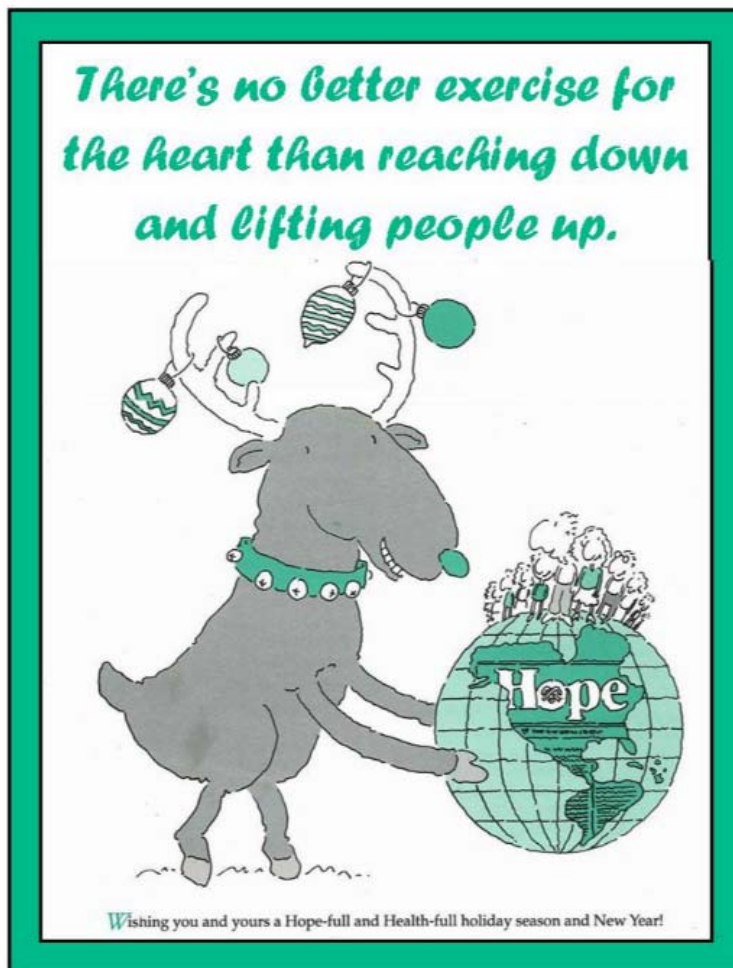
- It is okay and healthy to talk about difficult feelings, even during celebratory times.
- It is respectful and healing to acknowledge family members who are no longer with you this year and consider having people share some memories of them.
- Encourage discussions of gratitude like going around the table and have everyone mention something they are grateful for.
- Schedule time for you and your family to perform a service project: serve food to the homeless, or make a trip to Target to purchase toys to donate to Toys for Tots. Acts of charity add depth, meaning and perspective to the holiday season.

Be good to yourself!

Start the holiday season and New Year with that intention.

- Remember what Brenè Brown tells us, "***We can't practice compassion with others if we can't treat ourselves kindly.***" So, from this place of self-love and gratitude, savor your family, friends and celebrate the joy and beauty of this magical season.

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