

# HEAL for the HOLIDAYS

While the holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and happiness, for many people they can be a stressful and even sad time. Financial strain, family conflict, work responsibilities and other factors can contribute to a not-so-merry holiday season. In these challenging times, pandemic worries add to the mix and complicate planning. We were all hoping that friends and families could gather easily this year to either celebrate or simply share times together. Unfortunately, that's still quite complicated. So, maybe it can be helpful to HEAL this season as we try to be more kind and patient with ourselves and our loved ones.

## HOPE

The past two years have brought so much stress that it can be hard to remember that we can still hold hope in our lives. What are you feeling hopeful about – big or small? What are your friends and family members feeling hopeful about? For many, we can be afraid to hope for fear of being disappointed. This fear is understandable. However, see if you can identify something you were hoping would go well, and it did. This process might guide you in thinking about similar things you hope for. And while the pandemic and other events have brought bad news, seek out stories of positivity and goodness – those where people are helping one another – that reminds us that there is still a reason to hope.

## EXPECTATIONS

All those commercials of toys under the tree, people celebrating at parties, and perfect social media pictures... they all set a high bar for expectations. What we know is that pictures don't tell the whole story. So, instead of comparing your life to others and setting expectations according to holiday ads, think about realistic expectations for yourself, friends, and family. What feels like a doable plan? Share your ideas with those that you might celebrate and/or live with. Giving voice to your plans and agreeing on expectations takes a lot of pressure off and allows you to enjoy the holiday season for what it is meant to be – a time of appreciating those in our lives and sharing moments together.

## ANCHOR

Who is an anchor in your life – a person or maybe persons that is routinely there for you? And who are you an anchor for? Having just one trustworthy, reliable person in our life adds meaning, happiness, and genuine connection. During the holidays, celebrate the person(s) who are your anchor and don't forget that kids and pets can be anchors too since they ground us and remind us what is truly important in our lives.

## Little Things

Forget go big or go home... it's truly the little things in life that can bring tremendous joy. A cup of hot chocolate, sledding in the snow, sharing a huge laugh with friends, hearing a song from the 80s, or just a good walk with your dog. In the same way, holiday gifts don't have to be big or expensive; they can be handmade, thoughtful and inexpensive – or just plain silly. A gift is meant to show that you appreciate and care for someone and that you picked it because you know them well and understand what will make them smile. Put those gifts at the top of your list.