


COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS 2023

4th edition




INTRODUCTION



The holiday season can be a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness, but it can also bring stress, anxiety, and overwhelm. This booklet is designed to provide you with practical strategies and tactics to help you cope with the holidays and make the most of this special time of year.

The Washington County Behavioral Health Board highlights special concerns to be mindful of during this holiday season; prioritize your mental health and wellness while celebrating. The holidays are continuing to look a lot different for everyone this year, and with the right coping strategies, we can all make the most of this holiday season.

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Tips for Overcoming Holiday Stress

The holidays can be a stressful time, but there are ways to reduce and cope with that stress. Here are a few:

- **Budget** — Much of the holiday stress many feel is triggered by financial strain. Spending money on gifts, food and travel all add up to a big chunk of change. Instead of maxing out credit cards to make it through the holidays, create a budget. Go over all your financial obligations (like bills). Then figure out with your extra money how much you feel comfortable spending on Christmas presents.
- **Set Limits** — During the holiday season some people decide to take on too much responsibility. Don't feel obligated to attend or see anyone that causes you mental stress.
- **Don't Overindulge** — One of the best things about the holidays is the food. While it's great to taste and indulge in foods you only make once a year, it's another to overindulge.
- **Practice Saying "NO"** - Some people are non-stop busy during the holidays. However, you're only one person. The thinner you stretch yourself and your time, the quicker your holiday stress builds up.
- **Limit Alcohol Consumption** — Excessive drinking can increase depressive symptoms. You don't have to completely give up alcohol, just monitor your intake and your depression symptoms to make sure your mental health is not slipping because of it.
- **Don't Focus On Perfection** — Holiday stress can be attributed to trying to achieve perfection. Your loved ones will love you regardless! It's time to let go of perfection and focus on fun instead!
- **Don't Forget "Me Time"** - It is easy to lose yourself when trying to please everyone else. Take some time to enjoy a few things for yourself. Make sure that your party has one of YOUR favorites.
- **Have A Positive Outlook** — A positive attitude is essential during the holidays. Avoid thinking negatively about the season, which will trigger your stress response. Instead, focus on the joys of the season and the people you love. When you feel happy and optimistic, you can cope better with challenges and avoid



Holiday Season Self-Care Tips...

For many, the holiday season means planning and taking care of others. However, this leaves little time for taking care of oneself. Below are a few tips on practicing self-care during this holiday season:

- **Regularly schedule time to engage in self-care activities**, such as exercise, meditation or a hobby you enjoy.
- **Practice gratitude for the people and events in your life.** Consider keeping a gratitude journal or telling important people in your life why you appreciate them.
- **Tune into the emotions you are experiencing.** Emotions may be positive, negative or a combination of the two. Call “time outs” for yourself and check-in on your feelings. Remember that you’re not alone with what you’re feeling. You can talk to trusted family and friends about it.
- **Try to understand why you might be experiencing negative thoughts or feelings.** Are you expecting too much from yourself? Feeling overwhelmed? Give yourself space you to cope in those moments.
- **Monitor your stress level and notice what triggers your stress response.** Is it certain people? Specific activities? Have a list of activities to relax. Perhaps this is taking a walk, doing a few minutes of yoga, watching a favorite movie or playing with a pet.
- **Be present.** Practice mindfulness and meditation. Try taking a minute to be present in your environment. Take notice of the smells, sounds and sights of the holidays. Notice the differences between the holiday season and other times of the year.
- **Take care of your physical health.** Ensure adequate sleep. A nutritious diet is important: try to balance holiday foods and treats with healthy eating.



Grieving During the Holidays

Coping with loss during the holidays can be difficult no matter how recent your loss is. Remember, it's not about getting over, it's about getting through.

- **Love does not end with death.** Holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief—a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Sounds, sights, and smells of the holidays may trigger memories of the loved one who has died.
- **Talk about your grief.** Don't be afraid to express your feelings about your loss. Ignoring your grief won't make the pain go away and talking about it openly may make you feel better.
- **It's okay to leave early.** You might feel like you're up for a social gathering until you get there and realize "I am not okay being here". That's okay. Give yourself permission to go home early—your friends and family will understand.
-
- **Surround yourself with supportive people.** Only surround yourself with people who make you feel supported & understand that you're grieving and might not be up for celebrating this year.
- **Don't feel guilty about feeling joy in the season in spite of the fact that you are grieving.** Imagine that your loved one would want you to continue to find joy and that you are celebrating the happiness they brought to you as you continue to include memories of them in your celebrating.
- **Actively 'remember' the person who died.** If it feels like you're constantly avoiding the grieving elephant in the room – well, why not lean into it? Sometimes embracing the fear is less problematic than you imagine. Bring the person who died back into your Christmas: for me, that means watching home movies of my parents, looking at family photos, and retelling my favorite holiday stories about them. I make them more alive.

Dealing with Loss or Change

The holidays can be painful for those who have lost a loved one or have gone through divorce, especially children. Coping with separation and loss is magnified during the holidays. People may feel pressured to celebrate the holidays while their world seems to be falling apart.

- **Share memories** — If it's appropriate, share a favorite memory of the loved one. It's deeply healing to hear stories about someone you are missing. If there isn't time or it's not an appropriate setting to share memories, write them down and send them later with a card. They will be a cherished treasure.
- **Support their holiday choices** — You may not love their decision to skip certain holiday events, drop or change traditions, fly to Bali, or whatever else they have decided to do to cope. Keep in mind the holidays are incredibly difficult in grief, so respect and support their coping choices.
- **Don't let a person spend too much time alone** — If a person becomes depressed, help is available from the crisis hotline 24 hours a day [\(Pg. 20\)](#).
- **Offer Practical Help and Support** — Try to offer something specific rather than offering a vague offer. Some things that might be helpful are offering to help them with decorating (if they plan to decorate), help with holiday shopping, gift wrapping, watching their kids so they can go shopping, offer to take their kids to holiday events they might not be up for, cleaning, prepping for a holiday meal, etc.
- **Invite them to holiday events, but don't push** — Extend holiday invitations, but make it clear that you absolutely understand if they aren't up for it. Even if they have said no the last few years, still extend invitations while making clear you won't be offended if they don't make it.
- **Listen without minimizing, judging, or giving advise** — If your friend/loved one just needs to vent, complain, and emote about their misery trying to make it through the holidays, just listen and support them. Don't try to find a silver lining, don't tell them they should be over it, don't tell them what they "should" or "shouldn't" do. Just be there!
- **Remember** — many people think of their pets as part of the family, and their loss can be painful too.



Getting Through Divorce

- **Be Present in the Holidays** — Enjoy the present regardless of where you are in your divorce. Enjoy your kids and your holiday schedule. Enjoy the holiday moments, the actual holidays, and the fun nights without homework and no school to rush to in the morning. The holidays after divorce are still special for you and your kids.
- **Don't be afraid to mix it up** — There is no rule that says you always have to get a tree or bake or spend a certain day at so and so's house. If what you've always done before is now something you find yourself dreading, do things differently. Create new traditions and new patterns that you can actually look forward to. If you have kids, brainstorm together what things you'd like to do for the holidays. Challenge yourselves to think outside the box!
- **Do Something You've Always Wanted** — Have you dreamed of flying to the beach for the holidays? Or serving in a soup kitchen on Christmas Eve? If your spouse held you back from those things in the past, now's the time to start doing them! Take your Christmas after divorce as a time to do something you've always wanted to do but never could with your spouse in tow because of their opinions, family obligations, or other issues. Planning something like this in advance of the holidays will give you something to truly look forward to as Christmas draws nearer.
- **Stay Away From Unsupportive People** — We all have those people in our lives that never have anything supportive to say. Steer clear of those folks on the first Christmas after your divorce. Give yourself time to feel stable and secure in your new situation.
- **Focus on your children** — “If you have children, you can't simply write off the holidays. That would be tough on them. But be mindful that you may not have the capacity or resources to do everything you've done in the past. Nor should you try to compensate for the divorce by spoiling them with presents. Instead, give your children genuine time with you! Pick the most important rituals you want to focus on—cookie making or holiday decorating or caroling or visiting family and friends.

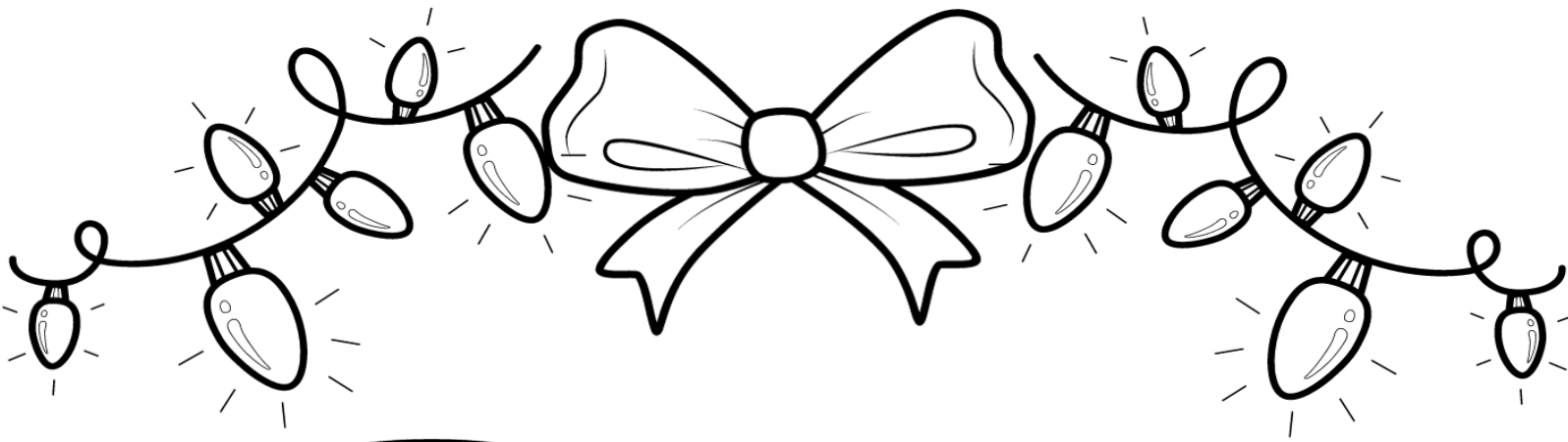


CHILDREN, TEENS & THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season can cause stress for children and teens too, and not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Watch for behavior changes in your child.

- Frequent mood changes.
- Withdrawing from family, peers, and or activities that typically provide joy.
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits (too little or too much)
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting).
- Lacking energy or purpose
- Inability to concentrate, which may result in trouble in school.
- Changes in personality, engaging in risk-taking behavior.
- Thought of suicide or death.
- Engaging in self-harming behavior
- Engaging in substance use.
- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Emotional outbursts or increased irritability - Stress leads to stronger feelings of anger and irritability. Your children may have emotional outbursts that are inconsistent with their previous behavior or the current situation.
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches - When children are stressed or anxious, their bodies release the hormone cortisol into the blood. This can trigger abdominal cramps and headaches.
- Increased defiance - Children under stress may feel angry or overwhelmed. They are seeking ways to get out of the situation that is causing them to feel uncomfortable. This can lead to defiant and stubborn behaviors.





IF I FEEL MAD OR SAD I TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO RELAX & BREATHE. THAT HELPS ME **COOL DOWN.**



MERRY CHRISTMAS

Coping Skills for Kids Word Search

T	P	T	A	K	E	B	R	E	A	K	T	R	A
A	L	K	C	L	S	C	E	A	U	S	D	O	E
L	A	L	E	A	M	T	C	O	L	O	R	E	O
K	Y	A	O	E	C	S	E	A	O	M	X	E	R
T	G	W	J	E	I	S	E	A	H	G	U	A	L
O	A	E	B	N	M	U	S	I	C	I	A	C	E
S	M	R	G	E	E	H	T	A	E	R	B	N	L
O	E	A	L	A	O	L	K	E	E	D	L	H	I
M	O	E	M	D	A	B	K	N	M	E	T	A	M
E	G	O	A	R	K	O	Y	O	G	A	M	E	S
O	R	N	W	R	I	T	E	H	A	A	E	A	T
N	C	E	J	O	U	R	N	A	L	T	A	T	A
E	R	E	A	U	P	D	K	H	T	H	L	W	L
O	E	O	C	D	P	E	X	E	R	C	I	S	E

TAKE BREAK
 BREATHE
 TALK TO SOMEONE
 WALK
 EXERCISE
 YOGA

WRITE
 JOURNAL
 READ
 MUSIC
 SING
 DANCE

SMILE
 LAUGH
 COLOR
 PLAY GAME



Children, Teens & The Holidays

- **Manage Your Own Stress** — Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the holidays calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for children.
- **Keep Your Routines (as best as possible)** - Its important to keep regular routines even during the holidays.
- **Manage Expectations** — Be upfront, let kids know what they can and can't expect during the holidays.
- **Talk to Them** — Be honest, focus on the positive and give them space for their feelings. Be available to answer questions they may have.
- **Reassurance and Resilience** — Reassure children that everything will be okay even if things don't go as planned. Share with them how you deal with stress so that they can learn from you how to cope with stress.
- **Spend Time Together** — Real time, where you are sharing an activity and doing things that involve actual interaction. Play games together, bake cookies, etc.
- **Create a New Holiday Tradition/Ritual** — Make homemade gifts or new decorations ,create things you can do together every year that are meaningful and fun. Get children involved with helping others — donate to a toy drive, call or write to a family member, etc.



Older Adults and the Holidays

The holiday season can be filled with family, cheer, and joy, but it can also bring feelings of loneliness and stress for many older adults. Travel can be difficult, along with special diets and shopping. Here are some things that you can do to help diminish holiday stress for your older family members and friends.

- **Include them** — When you can, involve older family members and friends in activities they can safely enjoy. It's tricky during cold and flu season, but inviting them to family dinners, weekend trips to the movies, or other activities can help them feel more connected. If an older adult you love is less mobile, make some time to visit them in their space. Bring over a game or a friend and spend some quality time together.
- **Stay connected** — Staying in touch is important for older adults who might feel disconnected. You don't necessarily have to see someone in person every day to make them feel like they're a part of your life
- **Help them add festive touches to their home or room** — Try to decorate in stages to prolong the fun and give them something to look forward to. Some small, easy-to-use decorations in senior apartments include removable window clings, garland, and artificial wreaths or floral arrangements.
- **Prepare a memory book of past celebrations** — to help seniors with dementia anticipate this year's festivities and reminisce about those they enjoyed in the past.
- **Help the adult in your life by monitoring their medication intake and alcohol consumption** — During the hectic holiday season, it can be easy for older adults to forget to take their medications or drink a little too much. Look out for their best interest at all times.



Memorial Health System Wellness Center for 55 PLUS –

The Wellness Center offers a safe and comfortable atmosphere for those in our community age 55 and over looking for a place to exercise. Located on the Wayne St. Medical Campus in Marietta, the facility is easily accessible with plenty of convenient parking.

Members pay a low annual fee of \$60

Membership is FREE for Silver Sneakers participants!

Provided with an individualized orientation to the facility upon enrollment.

Our experienced team provides thorough instruction on proper use of equipment, and is available to give guidance on safe progression of exercise, assist with blood pressure monitoring, and provide general health and wellness education.

Visit <https://mhsystem.org/communityoutreach>

Call 740-568-5380

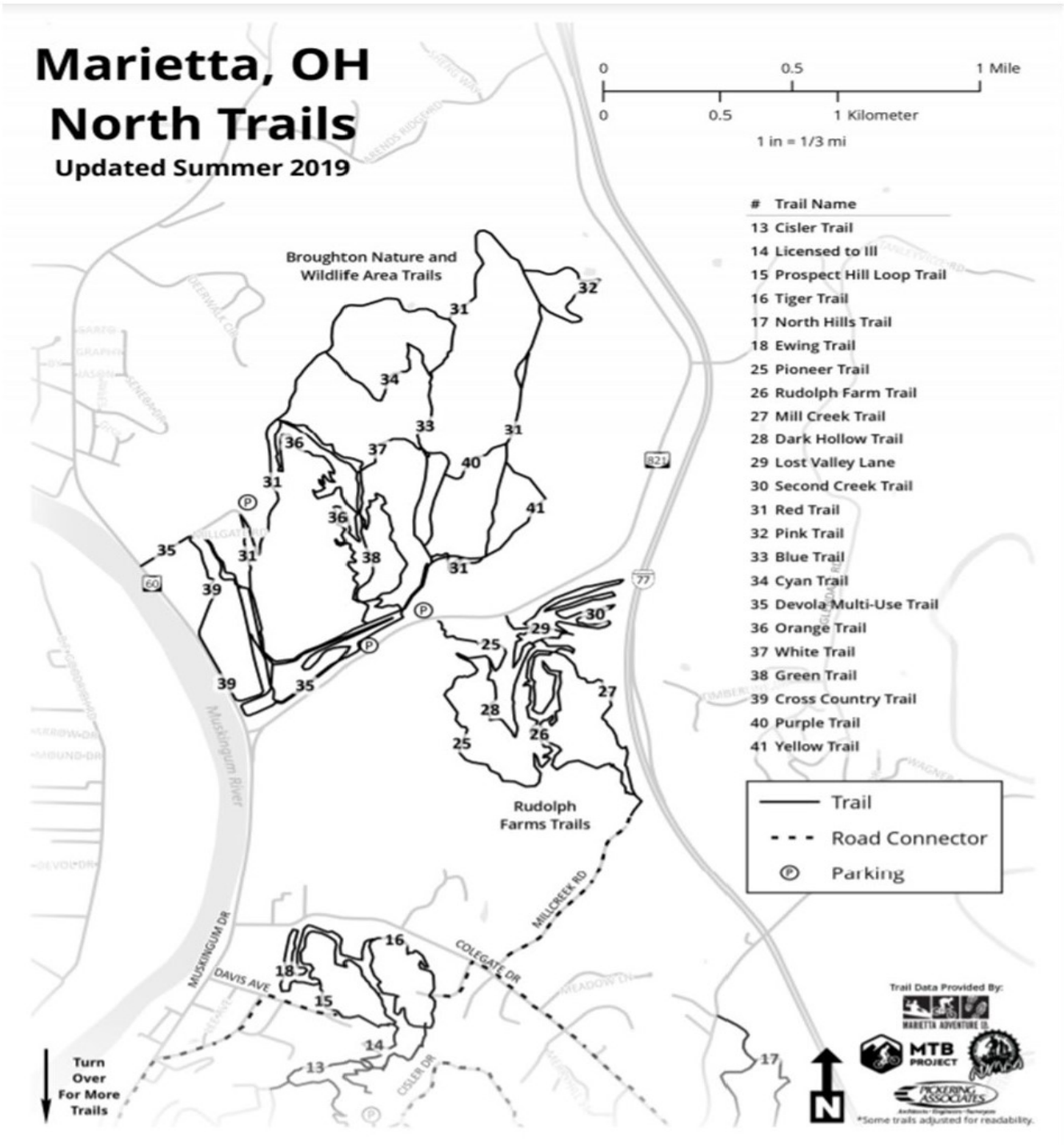


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HEALTH SYSTEM

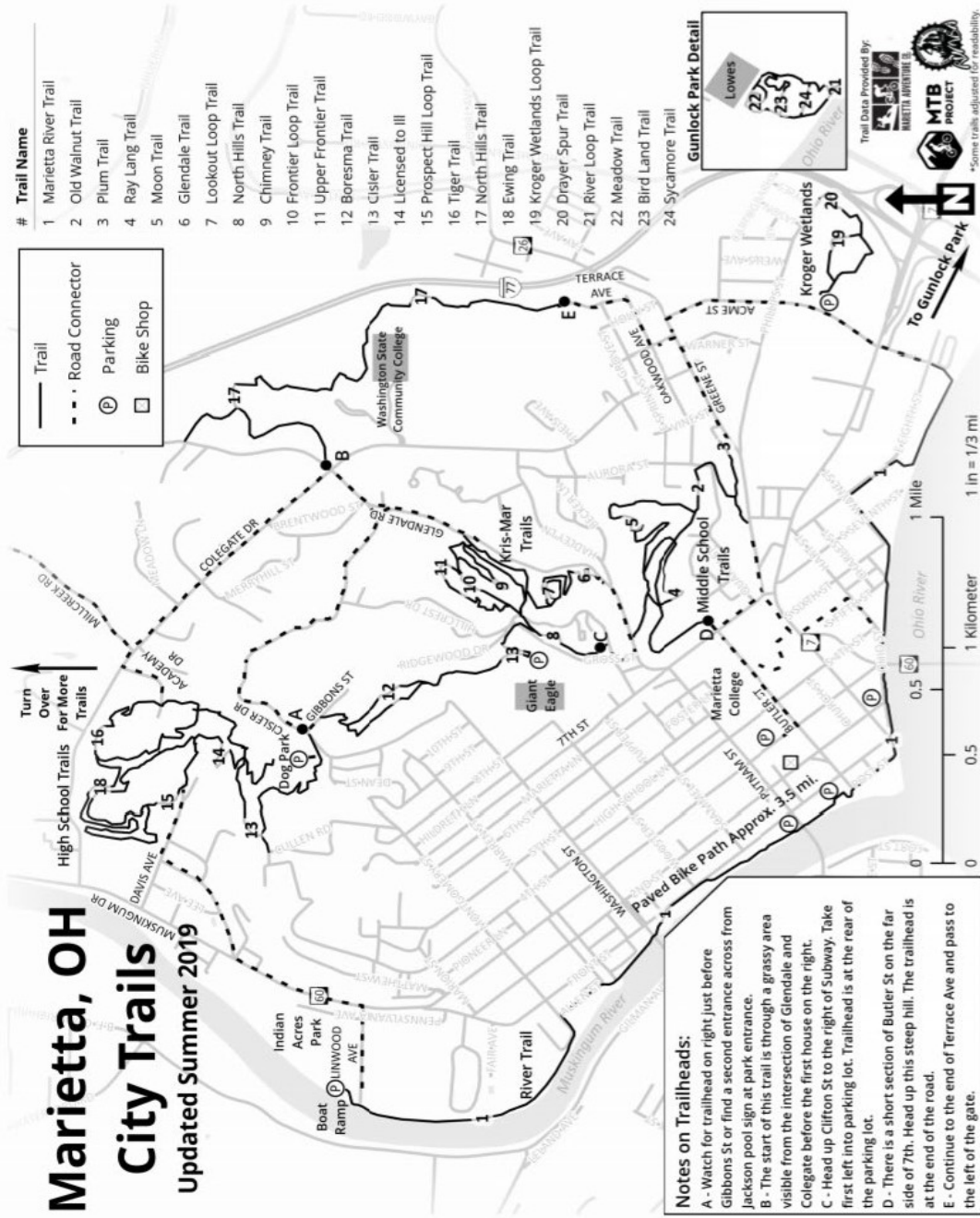


Local Trails for Walking & Biking

Exercise and fresh air are two great ways to relieve stress. Walking and biking is a way to be social and remain socially distanced at the same time! Check out the Marietta, OH North Trails and the City Trails on the next two pages.



Local Trails for Walking & Biking





TIPS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN RECOVERY

During the holiday season it is important that those in recovery remain alert. Holidays can be a substantial challenge to those suffering from SUD (Substance Use Disorder).

- Put your recovery/sobriety **FIRST**.
- Only attend the “right” holiday gatherings — Be honest and realistic if an event is about family or to put oneself closer to alcohol. Ask yourself, if this event would be there, even if no alcohol would be served.
- Always have your own transportation home — If you find out , that you feel uncomfortable, don’t get “stuck” because you cant leave. Take your own car if possible to be able to leave any time you like.
- Your meeting is still there, 12-steps are available — It is the holiday, but meetings are not closed. In fact they are often very crowded and a great place to meet new people in recovery. If you go to a family party, why not attend a meeting before or after?
- Remember - it is OK to say “no” to going somewhere that may threaten your recovery/sobriety.

Hosting a Recovery-Friendly Holiday Party

- If you have a loved one in recovery, ask them prior to an event how you can be supportive.
- Always have non-alcoholic beverage options.
- Be understanding if your loved one must leave early or can only stay for a short while.
- Remember – you can’t cause, cure or control someone's illness or recovery.

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)

SAD, also known as the winter blues, is a type of depression that comes and goes with the four seasons. It typically manifests during the cold autumn and winter months when the days are shorter, darker and chillier. Some tips that may alleviate SAD symptoms include:

The most common treatment for seasonal affective disorder is light therapy. Since winter is associated with a reduced amount of daylight, it's believed that this alone can cause seasonal affective disorder in otherwise healthy people. It also explains why it's more common in those who live farthest away from the equator.

One symptom of seasonal affective disorder is a craving for carbohydrates and sugary, sweet foods which often results in weight gain. But choosing the *right* foods can actually help treat seasonal depression. Complex carbs such as whole grains, fruit, vegetables and beans will still satisfy the craving without the added sugar.

Put some extra effort into getting physical indoors. You can join a gym or sign up for fitness classes. Swim laps at a local indoor pool or simply walk around the mall. Try out a dance class or [start taking yoga](#). There are several things that you can do indoors when the weather isn't great outside, it just takes a little bit more effort.

[Hygge](#), pronounced 'HOO-gah' is a Danish way of life that's recently become popular in Western culture. It basically refers to anything that makes you feel cozy and comfortable. It's a simple concept that you've probably done before without even realizing. The Danish people have incorporated it into all aspects of their lifestyle and make it a priority, especially in the cooler months.

10 Meaningful & Inexpensive Ways to Celebrate the Holidays

There are plenty of meaningful and inexpensive ways to celebrate the holidays. Here are some ideas:

- Have a cookie baking competition or ginger bread house contest.
- Read stories, watch a movie or check out holiday light displays.
- Have children sing to their grandparents and other family.
- Create a playlist of favorite holiday songs that everyone can add to and listen to even if you are not all together.
- Make a homemade gift or decoration.
- Look back at family photos and add some new ones to your collection.
- Plan a holiday sweater competition.
- Play holiday-themed charades or check out some of the games available for free online.
- Have each person write on a piece of paper something he/she appreciates about each member of the family and one gift (that can't be bought) that he/she will give each member. For example, a child might write, "Dad, I really appreciate the fact that you take time to help me with my homework. My gift to you will be at least 15 minutes to relax when you get home." Then, everyone takes turns reading what they wrote.
- Share some of your favorite recipes; write them on pretty cards and mail them as gifts. You could share them by email also.





Reach Out if You Need Help, Resources are Available

If you or someone you know is in crisis or if the stress of the holiday season becomes too much, please seek help. You can get help from any of the following:

Washington County Behavioral Health Board: 740-374-6990

Washington County Health Department: 740-374-2782

Marietta Belpre Health Department: 740-373-0611

United Way 2-1-1: 24/7 basics needs hotline (has information for all local resources- mental health, addiction, housing, food pantries, transportation, childcare, etc.) dial 211

Crisis Text Line: text "4Hope" to 741741

24-Hour Warm Line: 440-886-5950 Need a listening ear? Call the Warm Line, and a peer-supporter will listen and talk you through a hard holiday season.

24-Hour Line: Text OPIOID: 898211

Washington County HOPE Suicide Support Group: 740-350-3365

OhioMHAS COVID Emotional Support Careline: 1-800-720-9616



Local Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Treatment Providers

Rigel Recovery Services (Reno, OH): 740-371-5160

Hopewell Health Center (Belpre, OH): 740-423-8095
(Marietta, OH): 740-376-0930

Integrated Services for Behavioral Health (Marietta, OH):
1-800-321-8293

For a more complete listing of local providers
scan the following QR code.



**Whether it's your friends,
family, or community, everyone
needs someone to lean on.**



If you don't know where to turn,
you can text **4HOPE** to **741741**

A volunteer Crisis Counselor with Crisis Text Line
will be there to text with you.
It's free and 24/7

MERRY CHRISTMAS

A Message from the Washington County Behavioral Health Board

The holidays can be a wonderful time for making memories and connecting with loved ones. By applying the strategies and tactics outlined in this booklet, you can reduce stress, build resilience, and make the most of the holiday season. Remember that it's okay to seek help and support when needed, and that self-care should always be a priority. With the right tools and mindset, you can create a holiday season that is truly meaningful and fulfilling.

The Washington County Behavioral Health Board and the public and private agencies we fund seek to provide high quality, evidence-based programs. We strive to make Washington County a community that lives and breathes Recovery is Beautiful, we all have to be passionate about recovery and champion the benefits it provides individuals, their families, and our community. It is our commitment to support individuals in having control over their lives, their healthcare decisions, and their recovery. No other issues impact entire communities quite like mental illness and addiction do.

Happy Holidays From,

The Washington County Behavioral Health Board

