

An aerial photograph of a crowded beach. In the upper half, many people are standing on the sand, arranged to form the word "Lifeline" in large, bold letters. The beach is wide and sandy, with many other people scattered around. The ocean is in the lower half, with waves breaking onto the shore. The water is a deep green color, and the waves are white with foam. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

12 Days of Mental Wellness 2022

The holidays can be a challenging time for many of us. We hope these tips from Lifeline's Crisis Supporters can be helpful in looking after yourself at this time of year.

No matter where you are these holidays –
remember that Lifeline is here for you.



#1 Acknowledge and accept your feelings

We may feel a mixture of emotions during the holiday season: exhausted, sad, angry, excited, happy or hopeful. All of these feelings are normal. It's important to acknowledge whatever we are feeling, because it can help us make sense of our experience and actions. If possible, try to accept the feelings without judgement, as putting pressure on ourselves to change our feelings can sometimes cause more stress than the feelings themselves. Making room for uncomfortable feelings – sitting with them, holding space for them and not pressuring yourself to feel differently – can be very powerful.

#2 Make space for grief and loss

Holidays and special occasions can intensify feelings of grief or loss and be a painful reminder of what we no longer have, whether that be a loved one, pet, relationship, employment or any other challenging change. It is important to remember that these feelings may continue long after the loss occurs and that is completely okay. This is a natural response and helps in the process of healing. You might find some of these strategies helpful:

- * **Honour your loss** in whatever way feels right for you
- * **Create a new tradition** – or maintain a meaningful tradition you love
- * **Reduce pressure to 'celebrate'** this time and instead, tune into what you need
- * **Share your feelings** with someone you trust, let them know what you need and how they can support you
- * **Schedule activities** or make plans with others
- * **Display a memorial decoration** or give a memorial donation
- * **Make time and space** on the day to honour the loss and your feelings.

#3 Focus on giving

The act of giving to others releases chemicals in our brains that make us feel happier and more socially connected. You might want to give some of your time, give someone a helping hand, or give a stranger a smile and holiday greeting. Certain acts of giving, like volunteering, can also provide opportunities for social interactions.

- * **Hint:** visit [Volunteering Australia](#) for lots of opportunities!

#4 Recognise your signs of stress and anxiety

Whether it's organising gifts and get-togethers or feeling pressured by constant reminders of the holidays, stress and anxiety can increase around this time of year. We all experience this differently. It can be helpful to listen to the signals our body is giving us to alert us that something is not quite right. It could be:

- * Feeling 'on edge' or unable to stop worrying
- * Physical reactions such as headaches, sweating or an upset stomach
- * A racing heart or rapid breathing

- * Feeling lightheaded, faint or dizzy
- * Restlessness or irritability
- * Feeling more irritable than usual
- * Changes in sleep patterns, fatigue and exhaustion.

Take the signals as an opportunity to try different strategies: distract yourself with enjoyable, low stress activities; talk to someone you trust; try some breathing or meditation; take a walk or do some exercise. Try experimenting and see what works best for you!



#5 Set (and maintain) healthy boundaries

Setting holiday boundaries is so important for health and wellbeing. Boundaries look different for everyone but may include saying no to people's requests, declining holiday invitations or house guests, or taking on fewer responsibilities. It's important to be direct and clear about boundaries with others ahead of time so they have time to adjust their expectations. This can be done in a firm but kind way.

When you first set boundaries, you might feel uncomfortable because you don't want to upset or disappoint anyone. However, this feeling is completely normal – it can be helpful to remind yourself that your needs are just as important as other people's needs.

#6 Make a holiday budget that works for you

The holiday season can be financially stressful as people often feel under pressure to spend money on gifts, gatherings and food. It may be helpful to create a budget to see what is within your financial means over this period.

Think about low cost ways to tackle the holiday season. Suggest a Secret Santa/Kris Kringle or another gift exchange with a spending limit. Give a voucher of your time as a gift, such as helping someone with DIY, gardening or babysitting. Get creative in the kitchen by baking a cake, bread or chutney. And instead of spending money at a restaurant, consider a BBQ where everyone can bring a dish.

#7 Take time out for you

You know that saying 'you can't pour from an empty cup'? We often get so caught up with preparation and plans for the holiday season, with the weight of expectations, or even with looking after other people, that we forget to take time out for ourselves. While this can be challenging for many of us, it is important that the holiday season include periods of rest, relaxation and reflection as we prepare for the start of a new year. Take time to engage in activities you enjoy, find relaxing or fun.

An aerial photograph of a sandy beach with waves breaking on the right. Four surfers are visible on the sand, each with their surfboard. Their shadows are cast long and dark on the sand. The ocean is a mix of brown and white foam from the waves.

#8 Get back to body basics

We all know that maintaining a healthy lifestyle can be difficult over the festive season! It can feel great to indulge a little over this period; just remember that balance and moderation is key. What we eat and drink can really affect how we feel. Here are a few tips to help you feel good:

- * **Try to eat nutritious and non-processed food**
- * **Try to avoid or moderate the use of alcohol and other drugs (including caffeine) as this can affect our mood and mental health**
- * **Move your body.** Get creative – think of skipping, cycling, dancing, nature walks or backyard games
- * **Maintain a regular sleep pattern and aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night**
- * **Stay hydrated.** Aim for about eight glasses of water a day, as our organs need water to function properly.

#9 Practice gratitude

Taking stock of what we're grateful for – from tiny things to major achievements – changes how our brains are wired.

Gratitude helps us to shift our perspective, to focus on what we have and the possible opportunities, rather than concentrating on what we don't have. Research has shown that over time, practicing gratitude helps to increase happiness, reduce stress and improve our ability to deal with challenging situations. People can feel and express gratitude in various ways.

You may want to keep a gratitude journal, mentally thank someone, or just connect with the good things in your life and keep these at the forefront of your mind. (There's a reason this tip is called 'practice gratitude' ... it really can take practice, so stick with it, and watch how it becomes easier over time.)

#10 Connect to combat loneliness

If you feel lonely, you are not alone! In fact, around 1 in 4 Australians say they are currently experiencing loneliness. This feeling often increases during

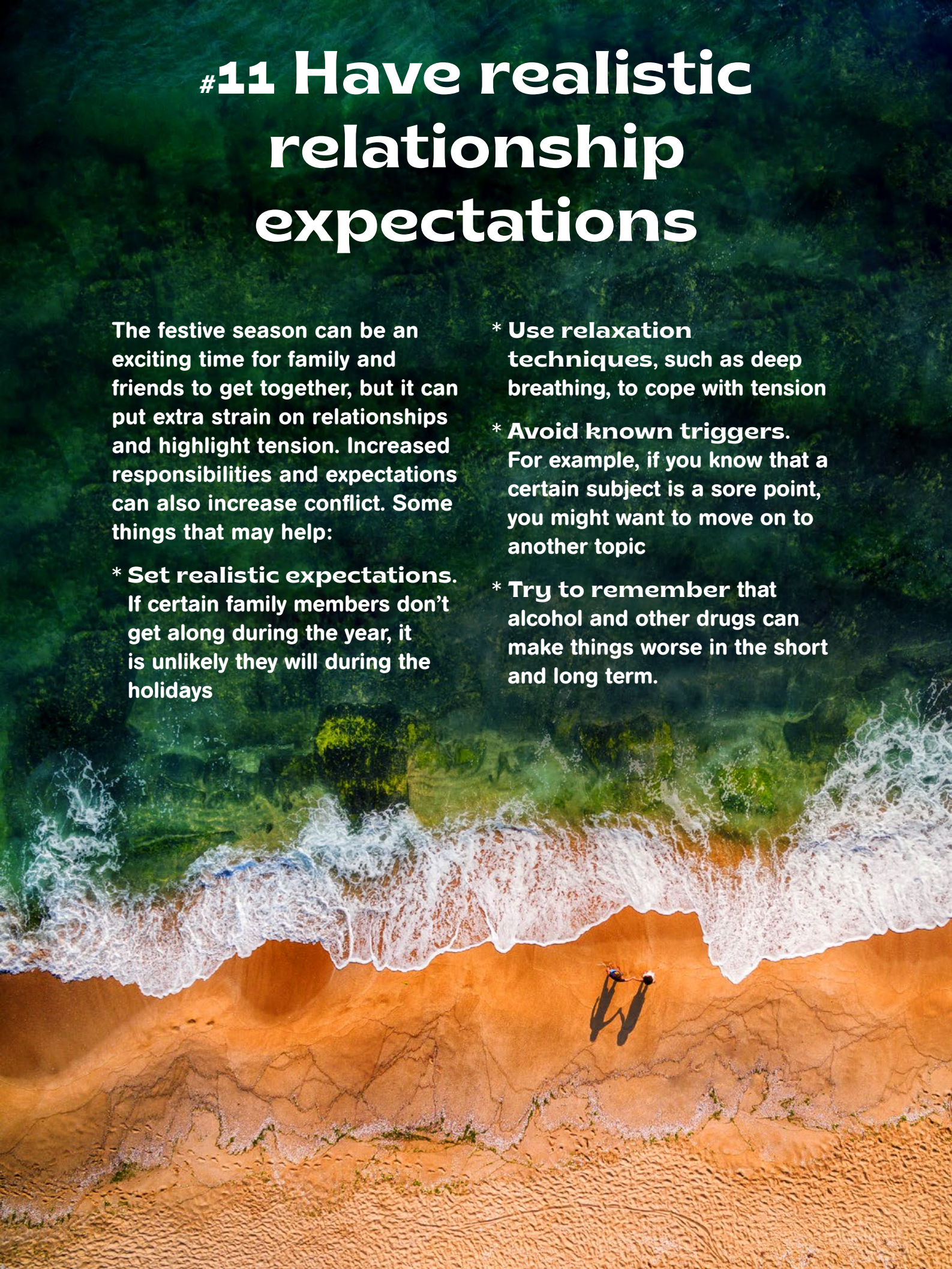
the holiday season, when there may be a mismatch between the amount of social connection we have compared to the amount we want. Some things that might help to reduce feelings of loneliness include:

- * **Avoiding comparison**
comparing ourselves to others can often make us feel less than other people
- * **Starting a conversation**
unexpected moments of connection can improve our mood. A simple hello can go a long way.
- * **Being kind to others**
offering help or support can help us build meaningful connections
- * **Reconnecting** we can all lose touch with friends over time, but it is never too late to reach out
- * **Setting a daily routine**
make sure to include meaningful tasks, enjoyable activities and creative endeavours
- * **Staying active** exercise releases hormones which increases feelings of happiness
- * **Learning something new**
or trying a new hobby; you could even consider joining a club, organisation or online community
- * **Participating** in work or community activities

#11 Have realistic relationship expectations

The festive season can be an exciting time for family and friends to get together, but it can put extra strain on relationships and highlight tension. Increased responsibilities and expectations can also increase conflict. Some things that may help:

- * **Set realistic expectations.** If certain family members don't get along during the year, it is unlikely they will during the holidays
- * **Use relaxation techniques,** such as deep breathing, to cope with tension
- * **Avoid known triggers.** For example, if you know that a certain subject is a sore point, you might want to move on to another topic
- * **Try to remember that** alcohol and other drugs can make things worse in the short and long term.



#12

Remember you're not alone

Whether it's 3am on Christmas Day, or 11pm New Year's Eve, Lifeline is open every day and night of the year ready to listen and support you. Reach out for help if you need it.



If you or someone you know needs crisis support, reach out to Lifeline 24/7 by calling 13 11 14, texting 0477 13 11 14, or visiting www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp

If life is in danger, call 000.

