



December 2020

KY SOS Links

- [About KY SOS](#)
- [Events & Education](#)
- [Standards](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Contact Us](#)



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**Kentucky Statewide Opioid Stewardship (KY SOS)
December Newsletter**

Happy Holidays from KHA and the KYSOS Team

Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and safe holiday season.

Avoid the Holiday Blues with a Mental Health Game Plan by KY SOS Advisory Committee member, Kellie Holland, MSW, RN

Bright lights, joyful parties, and family gatherings signify the start of each holiday season. This year with COVID, things are a little different. We may see no large family gatherings, no work parties, and limited shopping experiences. The stores will probably be decorated inside and out, the radio stations will be playing carols 24 hours a day, and there will be an endless supply of Hallmark movies to warm the heart. For some, all of this triggers the holiday blues. For people living with mental illness, the rate of the holiday blues escalates to 64%, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Contrary to popular belief, the suicide rate does not spike around the holidays. According to the U.S. Center for Health Statistics, the suicide rate is actually the lowest for the months of November, December, and January. However, there are so many emotional triggers from Thanksgiving through New Year’s Day. Everyone seems so jolly; eating rich foods, adding pumpkin spice to everything, and drinking copious amounts of alcohol. It is during this same time period that many experience the holiday blues. While they may feel the pressure of the holidays, most are able to compartmentalize these feelings and make it through.

The holiday blues are marked by feelings of stress, anxiety, and sadness that do not rise to the level of clinical depression. For someone with a mental illness, the symptoms may be amplified. Cravings for drugs or alcohol may increase as a means to numb the pain. The holiday blues may also impact people who have recently lost loved ones, ended a marriage or partnership, don’t have a job and can’t make ends meet, and those with unresolved family issues. Just being surrounded by all of the seemingly happy, perfect people, blissfully enjoying the holidays may create a sense of loss, resentment or frustration.

How do you avoid the holiday blues or a relapse during the holidays? Create a Mental Health Game Plan. You can incorporate as many of these following suggestions as you would like into your plan.

Keep your appointments. Maintain any scheduled appointment you may have with your therapist. And if the holidays are especially tough this year, schedule an extra session. If you belong to a support group or 12 step meeting, make time to attend an extra meeting. If fears of COVID are keeping you inside, telehealth is an option. Many therapists are offering virtual appointments and support groups offer virtual meetings online.

List three things you are grateful for every morning. If the idea of gratitude is new to you, start by simply being grateful you woke up, the last thing you ate or air in your lungs. You can expand your list over time to include anything for which you are grateful; the help from the grocery store clerk, the unconditional love of your pet, the smell of pine trees when you walk outside, the support from your best friend.

Journal your thoughts. Spend a few minutes each day just letting your thoughts flow onto the page. Release any negativity or worries that you are holding onto. Explore your positive thoughts or experiences from the day.

Avoid social media overload. Seeing the perfectly posed pictures of your friends' and family's celebrations, or pictures from your own past may trigger intense feelings of sadness, anxiety, or sense of isolation. Don't get caught comparing your experience to others. Savor the good memories and prepare to create new ones. If this is too overwhelming, take a social media break or limit your time each day.

Limit television viewing. Similar to social media, you can overload yourself with negativity from the news or overload your senses with the false reality of holiday perfectionism in movies and commercials. Replace TV time with a book, physical activity, or a phone call with a friend.

Schedule virtual holiday gatherings. Loneliness and isolation don't just impact our mental health. Research suggests social isolation and loneliness increase mortality as much as 32%. During the COVID pandemic, you may feel especially isolated. – If you feel especially lonely or isolated during the pandemic holiday, be pro-active and schedule virtual holiday time with family and friends to give you something to look forward to.

Schedule extra "me" time. Take time to relax and clear your thoughts. Some ideas to try include a warm bubble bath, long walk, massage, or reading a new book.

Get plenty of rest. Sleeping 8 hours a night helps to recharge your internal battery. Try sticking to a sleep routine, even if you are not working or going to school during the holidays. Your body and mind will appreciate the regularity.

Be mindful of diet and exercise. Indulging on all the extra treats may leave you feeling bloated and guilty. No need to deprive yourself, just make a plan.

Drink plenty of water. The extra hydration may decrease your appetite. Balance high sugar cookies and cakes with snacks higher in protein, like meat, cheese or nuts that are less likely to cause spikes in your blood sugar. Choose a smaller plate to trick your mind into feeling full with less food. Include exercise in your routine to boost your dopamine and enhance your mood. You don't have to start an exhaustive workout routine in the middle of the holidays. Try adding a 10 minute walk at lunch time, take the stairs instead of the elevator, or download a beginner's yoga routine.

Avoid excessive alcohol use or a relapse if in sobriety. If you are in recovery, reach out to the host before the party to ensure there will be non-alcoholic beverages served. If someone offers you a drink, ask what's in it. To help keep you focused on the event and away from a drink, volunteer to be the sober driver for you friends or family. Treat yourself to a warm cider, hot cocoa, or other seasonal holiday "mocktail." If you want to avoid drinking too much, try making "sparkling" wines by filling your wine glass half full with club soda; enjoy a glass of water between drinks; and have something to eat before your first drink.

Set realistic expectations. The holidays can also increase feelings of needing to meet expectations of others (like buying presents, making appearances to all family gatherings, and anxiety over how to answer invasive questions from some family members). Don't over extend yourself, set boundaries and make time to check-in with yourself and decompress.

Try meditation. Sometimes the rush of activities during the holidays, can feel overwhelming creating a never ending buzz in our brains. Take a timeout. If you have never meditated before, start with a simple routine. Find a quiet, comfortable place in your home where you can be alone for 15 minutes. Set a timer because the first few times five minutes will feel like forever. Dim the lights, get comfortable, and find a word to focus on, like "Relax" or "Calm". Slowly in inhale as deeply as you can through your nose and slowly exhale fully from your nose. If you prefer, you can breathe through your mouth. Let the thoughts of the day slip away. Focus on your breathing while repeating in your mind you focus word.

Don't see the holidays as a competition. There are no prizes awarded to the person who spends the most money, buys the nicest gifts, throws the biggest parties, or sends the most elaborate cards. The spirit of the holidays is sharing. Gifts of time are equally important. Don't replace the warm feelings of the holidays with feelings of anxiety over lack of financial resources.

Be positive. Focus on the positive things you have rather than the things you want or don't have. Create a positive mantra and repeat it to yourself throughout the day. Something like, "Things always work out for me." When feelings become hard to deal with, don't ignore them or numb them with alcohol or substances. Take a breath. Refocus. And remind yourself of one positive thing, experience, or person in your life. No matter which of these action items you elect to incorporate into your holiday, remember to take care of yourself and find happiness in the small things.

Happy Holidays.

Data Update

KY SOS continues to encourage all facilities to submit their monthly data into KY Quality Counts (KQC). As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, KY SOS understands resources are stretched and data entry might be delayed. Please continue to report **monthly** data on both the process and outcomes measures. Education and the future of the program are based in part on the data reported. Areas of improvement and areas of success will be highlighted and emphasized as KY SOS continues. If you need assistance with data input or navigation of the KQC data collection system, please contact **Emily Henderson** (ehenderson@kyha.com) or **Melanie Moch** (mmoch@kyha.com).

The Happenings

Upcoming Events/Webinar

- KY SOS Behavioral Health webinar series will host its final webinar on Monday, December 21 from 11:00 – 12:00 pm EST. Dr. Brian Greenlee, a staff psychiatrist with The Ridge Behavioral Health System, will present on The Role of Community-Based Recovery and Spirituality in the Treatment of Addiction. Current approved CEUs are for medicine and nursing, with HB1 CE pending at this time. Calendar invites will be sent closer to date.

Conference line: 1-877-594-8353

Participant Code: 56350822 #

<https://join.onstreammedia.com/go/41054140/greenlee>

Password: KYSOS

For more information, please visit www.kentuckysos.com or contact a KHA staff member to assist.

Emily Henderson for program and pharmacy-related questions–
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Melanie Moch for data-related questions – mmoch@kyha.com

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Claire Arant for administrative assistance – carant@kyha.com

Missed a webinar? All presentations are recorded and can be found under the events & education link.