

# 8 Tips for LGBT People to Lower Holiday Stress



Filed By [D Gregory Smith](#) | [December 22, 2009 5:30 PM](#) | [0 comments](#)

Filed in: [Living](#)

Tags: [anxiety disorder](#), [coping skills](#), [gay Christmas](#), [LGBT Christmas stress](#), [LGBT families](#), [LGBT Holiday Stress](#), [mental health](#), [Stress](#)

Feeling stressed and/or depressed lately? You're not alone. The holiday season is reported to be "problematic" for about forty-five percent of the general population, and there may be added concerns for LGBTIQ persons.



There is often so much pressure to be joyous and to share "the most wonderful time of the year". It can be especially hard for those of us who feel wounded by the various ghosts of Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa past. Family and work dynamics can be hard at the best of times, during the holiday season it can reach a torturous crescendo:

- "I can't stand so-and-so, and they're going to be at Grandma's for dinner."
- "I do not want to go to midnight mass with the family, but I'm more upset by the thought of dealing with the fallout of not going."
- "I just know that Bible-thumper at work thinks I'm going to hell. The office party is always a nightmare."
- "I'm going to have to fend off all the questions of why I'm not married."
- "If they knew the truth, I'd be fired (disowned, disgraced, etc.)."
- "I don't have enough money for gifts. Shopping is so much pressure. I feel inadequate compared to...."
- "I'm bringing my partner, and this is the first time. I'm worried that they'll say or do hurtful things."

Yep. All familiar. But there are some things to keep in mind when dealing with the stresses of the holiday season...

Remember, you're not alone. "Forced fun" with co-workers, family and extended circles of families and friends happens to everybody. Many people, straight, gay and otherwise feel that they aren't part of the celebration because they don't feel particularly festive or "in the Christmas spirit". The pressure to have fun, be nice and ignore grudges and difficulties can result in the completely oppo-

site effect. Not out to family, co-workers or friends? This can dramatically increase holiday stress. Maintaining a front and keeping secrets is hard.

Mostly, our day-to-day lives are lived with people who care for and support us emotionally. We've created our own families. We've created routines that encourage and nurture us. We've developed our own beliefs. The holidays can totally upset that. Even the mentally healthiest among us can be challenged by relatives and parents, regardless of acceptance or support. Ram Dass once said, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your parents."

And even if we are out, during the holidays we're often surrounded by people who may be biologically related or who share the same work, but who do not support us, or who are even openly hostile. Whether this is true or simply a suspicion or feeling, it still causes anxiety, which causes increased stress levels which often leads to some very depressing thoughts. A very slippery slope mentally....

What to do? If your particular situation seems to be causing problematic stress or depression, please seek out professional help. But for those relatively-minor-once-a-year issues, below are a few suggestions I have found helpful:

- **Be aware of your anxiety.** Notice when your tension levels are rising, and let yourself feel them. Feelings never hurt anybody- the actions resulting from those feelings are the real kicker, and quite often those actions happen because feelings are so bottled up that the pressure forces an explosion. Often, simply noticing and naming the anxiety can calm it.
- **Breathe.** Under stress, the breath is often shallow, keeping oxygen levels at a minimum which just adds more stress. As simple as it sounds, three deep, conscious breaths can bring instant relief, slowing the heart rate, reducing hypertension- and anxiety levels.
- **"Is that true?"** Most of my worst fears are never realized, and that question has been a lifesaver in many situations. My brain can run amok with fantasies of what people will say or do in response to me- things that I can't possibly know for certain. Anxiety levels rise in the face of uncertainty. This simple question slows my thoughts and brings me back to the facts.
- **Be here now.** Most stress involves either the past or the future- both are perspective distortion agents. Staying in the here and now reduces stress.
- **Resist the urge to self-medicate.** Most people eat and drink more and exercise less than they normally would at this time of year. If you're prone to depression already, (and even if you're not) a hangover and love handles won't help. Plus, alcohol, a depressant, may seem to help for a while, but usually worsens depression and stress symptoms later on. It also reduces inhibitions, making hurt feelings, disagreements and fights much more likely.

- **Give yourself an out.** If you have to spend an extended amount of time with family, work some down time into the schedule. Removing yourself from the situation can be vital, and it can be done gracefully. "I just need some alone time" is something that almost anyone will respect. There are lots of reasons to be alone- get creative. A short walk, a hot shower, a nap, an AA meeting, or even extended time behind the locked door of a bathroom can do amazing things to renew self-confidence, perspective and energy.
- **Remember, this is temporary.** Most of us can survive anything for a few days. If you're in a situation that you feel you may not be able to handle well, by all means, get out! But if staying will do less damage to yourself and others than leaving, remembering the finite nature of the visit may help.
- **Take care of yourself.** You know what you need to do to be healthy. Eat well, exercise, hydrate, rest, play and give yourself permission to be human.

No matter what the situation, my greatest stressor is worrying about something I have little or no control over. Recognizing that is key. People are going to think what they think, and my thoughts or actions will probably not change that in the short amount of time I have to spend with them during the holiday season. Whether they approve of me or not is none of my business- my business is to be happy, honest, kind, and healthy- and I can do it. I do it by knowing myself and taking care of myself- even under the pressure of midnight mass.

Please feel free to add your own tips. What works for you?



[Subscribe to The Bilerico Project](#)