

# Holiday Support Kit

A Resource from JSU Counseling Services  
Caring for Yourself Over the Holiday Break



## Purpose

The holiday season can bring both joy and challenge. Whether you're excited to go home, feeling uncertain, or a bit of both, extended breaks can disrupt the support systems and routines you've built at school. This Holiday Support Kit, created by JSU Counseling Services, is designed to help you maintain emotional well-being, stay grounded, and know where to find help and connection even when campus offices are closed.

Use this guide as a companion during your time away and a reminder that your well-being matters, and you are never alone in caring for it.



## 1. Grounding & Self-Care Tools

### Why It Matters:

When life slows down and structure changes, you may notice shifts in your mood, motivation, or energy. Grounding and self-care help you stay present and connected to yourself, especially

during emotionally or stressful moments.

## Grounding Techniques

When you feel overwhelmed, try one of these:

- **5-4-3-2-1 Method:** Identify 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- **Box Breathing:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. Repeat.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense and release each muscle group, starting from the toes and progressing to the head.
- **Temperature Change:** Hold something cold/cold water, run over your hands, or step outside for a minute to reset your nervous system.

## Daily Self-Care Ideas

- Get sunlight and movement daily. Even 10 minutes helps.
- Keep hydration and meals regular.
- Prioritize consistent sleep whenever possible.
- Take quiet breaks if family gatherings feel overstimulating.
- Do small things that bring you comfort, such as reading, baking, crafts, listening to music, playing sports, or spending time with a pet.

## Reflection Prompts

- What helps me feel calm when life feels hectic?
- What are 3 ways I can care for my mind and body this week?
- How can I create moments of peace for myself during the break?

## Helpful Apps

- **Insight Timer:** Free meditation and mindfulness tools.
- **Calm** or **Headspace:** Stress and sleep support.
- **YouTube Channels:** "Yoga with Adriene", "Therapy in a Nutshell."



## 2. Staying Connected While Away

### Why Connection Matters

Connection is one of the strongest buffers against loneliness and stress. During breaks, relationships can feel distant, but an intentional connection can keep you grounded.

# Ways to Stay Connected

- Schedule regular check-ins: Ask a friend, roommate, or peer to text or video chat weekly.
- Join online peer spaces.
- Volunteer locally or attend a community event to feel a sense of purpose and social connection.
- Connect with yourself through activities like journaling, reflecting, and noticing your emotions with curiosity, rather than criticism.



## 3. Boundaries with Family (Including Politics & Values)

### Why Boundaries Are Important

Being home can mean reconnecting with loved ones who care deeply for you, but also navigating old dynamics, expectations, and sensitive topics. Boundaries aren't about disconnection. They're about protecting your peace, energy, and identity.

## Common Boundary Areas

### 1. Time & Energy

- "I need a little downtime after meals to recharge."
- "I'm happy to join family events, but I'll also need quiet time."

### 2. Privacy

- "Please knock before coming into my room."
- "I'm handling things my own way, but I appreciate your concern."

### 3. Personal Topics

- "I'd rather not discuss grades, career plans, or relationships right now."
- "I know you care, but that topic feels stressful for me."

### 4. Politics, Religion, and Values

- The holidays can surface conversations about world events, elections, or beliefs. You have a right to step away from arguments or set limits on topics that feel draining or unsafe.
- You could reflect on:
  - "I'd rather not get into political debates during dinner."
  - "I respect that we see things differently, but I don't want to argue."
  - "Can we change the subject? I'd like to focus on enjoying time together."

**Remember, you can value harmony without agreeing on everything.**

## Strategies for Healthy Boundaries

- **Prepare in advance:** Consider potential triggers and how you would like to respond.

- **Use "I" statements:** "I feel uncomfortable when politics come up, and I'd like to talk about something else."
- **Have an exit strategy:** Take a short walk, listen to music, or help with dishes to shift energy.
- **Protect your energy:** It's okay to leave a conversation early or decline certain invitations.

### Key Reminder

Boundaries are not about controlling others.

They're about taking care of yourself.



## 4. Coping with Grief During the Holidays

### Understanding Grief

Grief is a natural, personal response to loss, whether it's the loss of a loved one, a relationship, stability, or simply the way life used to feel.

The holidays can amplify grief, especially when others appear joyful or when traditions highlight the absence of loved ones.

### It's Okay to Feel What You Feel

- Grief can look like sadness, anger, guilt, numbness, or laughter. ALL are valid.
- You can feel both grateful and heartbroken at the same time.
- Allow emotions to ebb and flow; there's no "right" way to grieve.

### Ways to Honor and Cope

- **Create a ritual:** Light a candle, write a letter, share a story, or play a song that reminds you of the person or time you miss.
- **Modify traditions:** Skip or adapt activities that feel too painful.
- **Create new meaning:** Do something that honors love such as volunteer, donate, or spend quiet time in reflection.
- **Reach out for support:** You don't have to carry grief alone.

### Words to Hold Onto

- "Grief is just love with nowhere to go."
- "Healing doesn't mean forgetting. It means remembering with more love than pain."
  - "It's okay to rest in the middle of the storm."



## 5. When You Need Extra Support

Even though JSU Counseling Services may be closed during the holiday break, support is always available through national and online resources.

### Crisis & Emotional Support

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 (any mental health crisis).
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 for 24/7 support.
- The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+): Call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678.
- SAMHSA Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357): For mental health or substance use resources.
- JSU Crisis Line: 256-782-5050 or call 911

### If You're Not in Crisis but Need Help

- Reach out to a trusted friend, mentor, or family member.
- Use mental wellness apps like Sanvello, MindShift, or Youper for coping tools.
- Journal about what you're feeling and what you might need.
- Make a plan to reconnect with JSU Counseling Services when you return.



## 6. Routine & Structure

### Why It Helps

Holidays often disrupt the structure that supports your mental health during the semester. Creating a gentle rhythm helps maintain balance and predictability.



Example Weekly Wellness Plan:

Day	Theme	Example
Monday	Move	Go for a walk, stretch, etc.
Tuesday	Connect	Call or message a friend
Wednesday	Create	Write, paint, cook
Thursday	Reflect	Journal about your week
Weekend	Play	Do something that brings you joy

### Tip

Keep your expectations realistic. Aim for balance, not perfection.

Even small acts of care count.



## 7. Encouragement & Affirmations

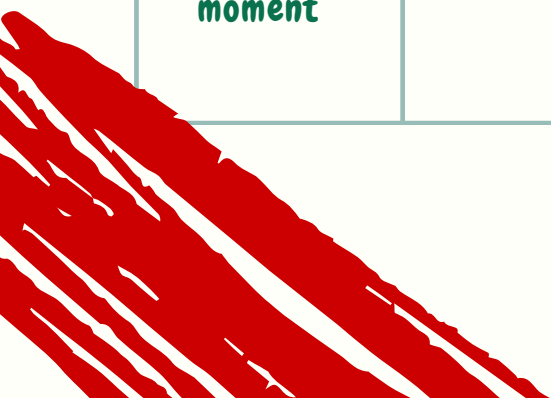
- "I can choose peace, even when things around me are noisy."
  - "Boundaries protect my energy, not my love."
- "My feelings are valid. Joy, sadness, and everything in between."
- "I'm allowed to take up space, even when it feels uncomfortable."
  - "Rest is not a reward. It's a necessity."

You've come far this semester. The holidays are a time to pause, reflect, and nurture yourself, not just to prepare for what's next, but to honor what you've already overcome.



# Mindfulness Bingo

Wake up early	Breathe deeply	Eat deliberately	Speak honestly	Look softly
Relate kindly	Listen wholeheartedly	Set a daily intention	Love fully	Live purposefully
Walk slowly	Listen to music	FREE SPACE	Write your thoughts	Take a break from technology
Show appreciation	Take time each day to reflect	Pause between action	Get lost in the flow of doing what you love	Connect with your senses
Be in the moment	Think freely	Notice your thoughts	Declutter one space	Get a good night's sleep





# My Tree of Needs

We all need things to live: like water, food, and a home are very important!

But we also need things like love and laughter.

What is your tree of needs to be healthy & happy?





# 12 days of self-care

HOW WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF DURING THE HOLIDAYS?



# Assertive Communication – ‘I-Messages’ or ‘I-Statements’

Assertiveness is a clear, honest, and direct way of communicating. It means expressing yourself in a way that shows respect for you and the other person. An effective way to do this is using “I-Messages” or “I-Statements”.

I-messages begin with “I” (for example, “I feel overwhelmed when I have so much work to do”) instead of “you” (for instance, “You overwhelm me when you give me so much work”). These statements help you take responsibility for your feelings and reactions without blaming other people, making it easier for them to listen and understand. Using I-messages also reduces the chance that the other person will become defensive or feel judged, which is a common reaction to “you-messages”.

## Assertiveness

### There are three types of I-Messages:

**“I feel...” Assertively expressing your feelings and emotions** These statements help you share your feelings about an issue. They are useful when you want to talk about how someone’s behavior affects you without being critical or judgmental.

“I was upset when you didn’t call.”

“I feel ashamed when you comment on how I look.”

“I feel happy when we spend time together.”

**“I think...” Assertively expressing your thoughts and opinions** These statements help you share your thoughts, opinions, and feedback clearly and respectfully. You can also use them to praise and compliment other people.

“I think we don’t spend enough time together.”

“In my opinion, this is the best solution.”

“I think you handled that really well.”

**“I need...” Assertively expressing your wants and needs** These statements help you express your needs and preferences honestly and directly. They make it easier for others to understand how to support you, even if they can’t always meet your needs.

“I need help with this.”

“I want some time to think.”

“I’d like more moments like this with you.”

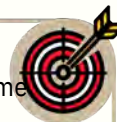
### How can I make my I messages most effective?

**Be focused** Keep your I-message short and simple, focusing on one issue at a time. This will make your statement easy to understand and won’t overwhelm the other person.



#### Be specific

Make your I-message clear and direct – don’t assume the other person knows what you think or feel. For example, if you want to express how someone’s behavior made you feel, make sure you refer to what they have done (e.g., “I felt hurt when you didn’t include me”).



#### Be respectful

Don’t label the other person or call them names. Rather than commenting on their character (e.g., “You’re selfish”), focus on your feelings about their behavior (e.g., “I feel sad when you make plans without me”).



#### Be timely

It’s best to use I-messages before your feelings build up. If you feel upset or overwhelmed, give yourself some time to cool down so you can express yourself calmly and listen.





# Tasks of Mourning

After a death, friends and family face complicated emotions, and a new reality without the deceased. They must learn how to keep the person within their hearts, while moving forward in life. The **tasks of mourning** describe how to adjust to loss in a healthy way.

Tasks may be completed in any order.

Tasks may be revisited multiple times.

Tasks may be completed at any pace.

## 1 Accept the reality of the loss.

- Accept the loss both *intellectually* and *emotionally*.
- Recognize the significance of the loss.

## 2 Process the pain of grief.

- Name and make sense of your emotions.
- Let yourself feel these emotions, rather than trying to bury them.

## 3 Adjust to a world without your loved one.

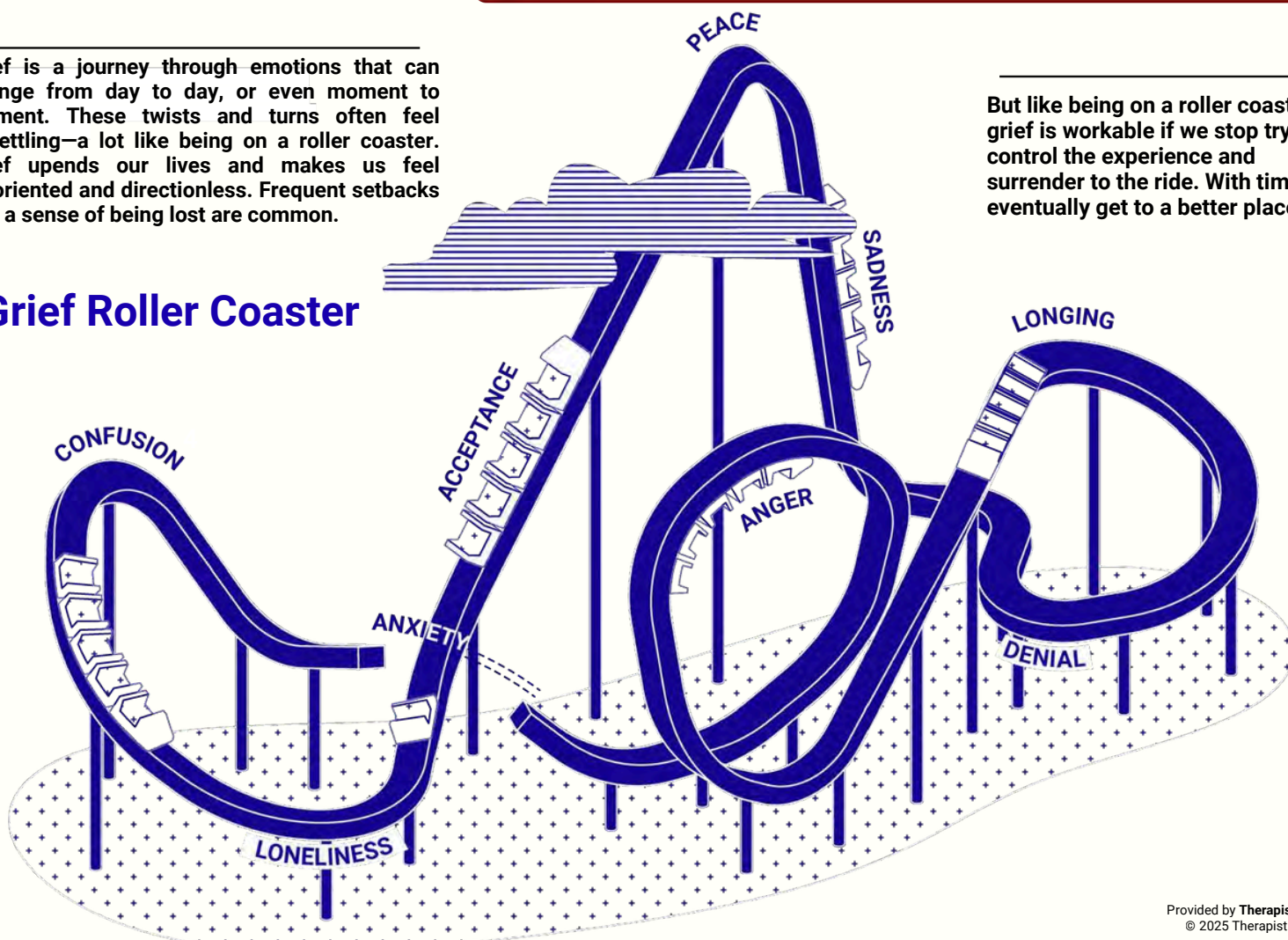
Make practical changes, such as taking over tasks your loved one used to complete.  
Adapt to a changing self-identity and worldview.

## 4 Remember your loved one while moving forward in life.

Create a place for your loved one in your heart that leaves room for new relationships.  
Find a balance between remembering your loved one and moving forward.

Grief is a journey through emotions that can change from day to day, or even moment to moment. These twists and turns often feel unsettling—a lot like being on a roller coaster. Grief upends our lives and makes us feel disoriented and directionless. Frequent setbacks and a sense of being lost are common.

## Grief Roller Coaster



But like being on a roller coaster, grief is workable if we stop trying to control the experience and surrender to the ride. With time, we eventually get to a better place.

# 38 Ways to Relieve Stress

In less than 10 minutes

by Sharon Martin, LCSW

- Listen to your favorite music
- Get some fresh air
- Stretch or do some yoga poses
- Do a grounding exercise
- Disconnect from technology 
- Talk to someone supportive
- Meditate
- Look at photos that make you smile
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Read for pleasure 
- Walk, bike, or skateboard around the block
- Count to 10 slowly and repeat
- Dance
- Journal
- Write down 10 things you're grateful for 
- Doodle, draw, color, or Zentangle
- Chew a piece of gum
- Watch a funny video on YouTube
- Sit in the sun 
- Punch a pillow
- Knit
- Read an inspirational quote
- Spend time with your pets 
- Do 20 jumping jacks
- Do something nice for someone else
- Hug a loved one 
- Visualize a safe, comforting place
- Pick some flowers (or pinecones or leaves or seashells or rocks)
- Give yourself a neck massage
- Take a shower 
- Kick a soccer ball
- Diffuse essential oils or use scented lotions or candles
- Slow, deep breathing
- Savor a cup of decaffeinated tea or coffee
- Repeat a mantra
- Do a progressive relaxation exercise
- Tend your garden; water and talk to your plants
- Make a list of your worries and identify which you can do something about 