



Tuscaloosa City Council agenda for December 17, 2019



LOOKING BACK: December 16, 2019



Tips can help ease holiday stress



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Preparing for and participating in events during the holidays can bring joy as well as emotional distress. Family Counseling Service of West Alabama is offering tips -- and help, if needed -- to help those with emotional and mental hardships to get through the season. [Staff file photo/Dusty Compton]

By Jason Morton

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Posted Dec 8, 2019 at 6:31 AM



The annual holiday season can bring joy as well as emotional distress. Family Counseling Service of West Alabama offers some tips on getting through.

As the holiday season builds toward its annual climax, so does the anticipated joys and delights that come with gift-giving and family gatherings.

But this time of year can also be emotionally difficult and depressing for some, as they look toward the inevitability of coping with the loss of deceased family members or stressful groups that fall outside their own personal comfort zones.

For that reason, Family Counseling Service of West Alabama's executive director, Larry Deavers, is encouraging those who may be dealing with these emotional and mental hardships to be prepared and, if necessary, to speak up.

He also urges anyone who might need help in coping with these situations to let their loved ones, or at least someone, know.

"Although there's a lot of joy that goes along with the holiday season, there's a lot of pressures and stressors that go along with it, too," Deavers said. "We tend to feel like we have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get it together and seem strong for everybody else.

"But, most of the time, everybody wants to be there for you."

● **Set boundaries** – A lot of stress comes from the obligations felt towards pleasing others, Deavers said.

"While some of this is necessary to maintain positive relationships, you need to guard against being taken advantage of or overloaded," he said. "You know how much you can do before you reach that point of feeling irritable, grouchy and overwhelmed."

Once that happens, everybody's good time is affected, he said.

"Enjoy your holiday on your own terms, as much as possible," Deavers said, "and set your own boundaries, even if you have to say 'no' to a few requests."

● **Plan ahead** – Anticipate what the primary obligations may be for this season and prioritize them,

making sure that secondary obligations do not take away from the things that are most important.

“Give some thought to the likely barriers that most often crop up and plan for ways to keep them from derailing you or taking up more of your attention than they should,” said Deavers, who has worked for the agency for 25 years – the last 13 as executive director.

Also, be prepared for the absence of a family member who has recently died or no longer there.

And for those most affected by the loss – a spouse or parent, for example – it can be helpful to let people know it’s OK to talk about the missing loved one.

“That can be a really helpful family bonding experience that’s good for everybody and takes the pressure of the person who is suffering the most,” Deavers said.

- **Know your limits** – Almost everyone has certain family members with whom they have a difficult relationship, which leads Deavers to recommend avoiding areas of conflict as much as possible.

“While the holidays may bring us together, the holidays may not be the best time to hash things out or allow a certain person to get under your skin,” he said. “This is another area where planning ahead can help you navigate those times that tend to create tension and allow you to think through your options for de-stressing in the midst of it all.”

- **Focus on creating memories** – Rather than allowing the chaos of the season to overshadow the fun, Deavers said it’s important to focus on slowing down during specific activities with friends or family and intentionally create special memories that can remain once the holiday season is over.

“One of the key points of the holiday season is those family connections and connections with things that are important to us, such as our faith, our family or serving others, and making it a time where you feel like the things that are important in your life – that make you who you are – are celebrated,” he said.

- **Reach out** – Should the planning, preparing and anticipation not be enough, find someone to talk to.

“Sometimes it’s not easy to follow certain tips and you just need to talk to someone,” Deavers said. “Family Counseling Service is here to help because we want the holidays to be a joyous time for everyone.”

[Family Counseling Service of West Alabama](#) is at the corner of Bryant Drive and 21st Avenue in downtown Tuscaloosa and can be reached at 205-752-2504.

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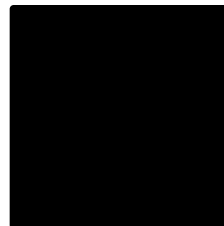
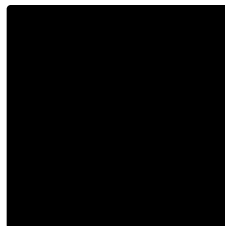
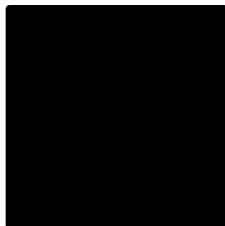
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