



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/family-managing-holiday-stress>

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Hope can help build resilience to holiday stress, says K-State health expert

Johannes outlines tips for keeping the 'happy' in the holidays

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – A Kansas State University health professional says that being hopeful can be an important asset in helping to assure that Happy Holidays don't become Grumpy Holidays.

Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation's Distinguished Professor of Community Health at K-State, said hope can help human beings develop resilience and even resistance to future adverse events in their lives.

"All of us, in our lives, have adversity (including) stress or worry...but yet, we can still have hope," Johannes said.

Citing research on resilience conducted by George Everly (Johns Hopkins University) and Froma Walsh (University of Chicago), Johannes said hope allows people to reframe a situation, which is necessary for growth.

"When we take time to reflect on what is going on in our lives – and think about the people who are there right alongside us – we can move ahead," Johannes said. "Once we do that reflection, that's when resilience happens. When we are a resilient person, family, network or community, then we become resistant, but not in a bad way; we become resistant to the next adversity."

Johannes says stressful situations come at various points in our lives, whether it be a national pandemic, election cycle, health concern or just getting along with family members around the dinner table.

Family get-togethers can become exercises in patience, particularly when family members have differing opinions on various topics. Johannes cites [recent research from the American Psychological Association](#) concluding that Americans want to have dialogue amongst themselves without conflict.

“The study talked about respecting different opinions,” Johannes said. “It’s important to respect and listen to the difference and have dialogue around it. That’s how to improve the situation in our communities and households.”

This time of year, Johannes notes, “there is a reason to hope, and there are good reasons for us to get along and have dinner and watch football games that we don’t really like but we’re just trying to keep the ‘happy’ in Happy Holidays.”

Family stress

[Johannes pointed to a publication titled Stress and the Family System](#) which she co-authored in 2021. The publication outlines five steps to help families manage stress during holiday get-togethers, or anytime:

- **Take a second.** Process the stressor event by yourself to gauge where you are on the situation and allow yourself to embrace your feelings about the stressor.
- **Pinpoint where the stress is coming from.** Knowing what is causing the disruption can help the family find solutions.
- **Identify your support system.** People in your support circle can help you mitigate feelings of being alone during stressful times.
- **Do some damage control.** Check in on the people who the stressor directly affected. Then, talk to other family members to see how they are feeling about the event.
- **Make sure to take care of your mental and physical health.** Get enough sleep, drink water and eat nutritious foods. Depending on the stress event, seek professional help.

“Though we may not be ‘happy’ the whole year through we can build our resilience by what we learn and gain from the stressors in our lives,” Johannes said. “We can focus on being constructive when we come together with family, friends, colleagues and community members. Before taking sides when there are disagreements, [there are some things to keep in mind before conflict happens, and subsequently take sides.](#) During the upcoming holidays, we can strengthen resilience now for our future.”

A longer discussion with Johannes on the topic is available on the weekly radio program, [Sound Living](#), produced by K-State Research and Extension.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Stress and the Family System (publication), https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/stress-and-the-family-system-fact-sheet_MF3486

When and how to engage constructively in family arguments during the holidays, <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/family-arguments-holidays>

Sound Living, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/radio-network/sound-living.html>

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