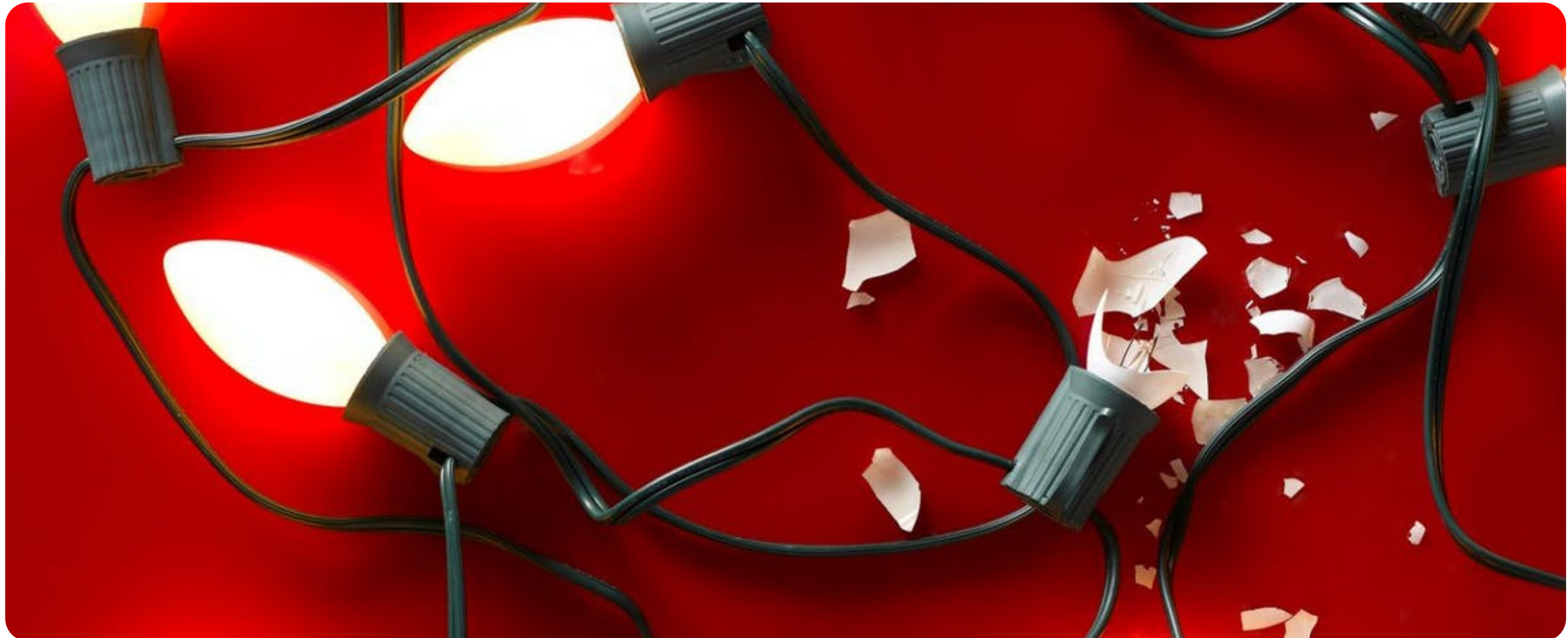


Four Reasons Why You Could Be Struggling to Self-Regulate After the Christmas Holidays

...and how Dialectical Behavioural Therapy could help you get back on track.



For many of us, the holidays go hand in hand with high expectations - quality time with our loved ones, delicious food and much needed time off from our daily responsibilities. But what does it mean when the holidays leave us exhausted, emotionally drained and – despite our hopes of rest and restoration – completely burnt out?

Despite so many of us running head first into the yearly fantasy of the 'perfect Christmas', a survey from the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) found that 64% of respondents felt the 'holiday blues' affected their mental health. In other words – you are not alone.

So, if the holidays are supposed to be 'the most wonderful time of the year', why do so many of us find ourselves crawling into January feeling overwhelmed and emotionally dysregulated? How can we press the 'reset' button and move towards balance and stability, ready for the year ahead? Luckily, DBT ([Dialectical Behavioural Therapy](#)) can offer solution-based techniques to address some of the key issues we face during and after a stressful holiday season. This is done through mastering four 'core skills'; interpersonal effectiveness, emotional regulation, mindfulness and distress tolerance.

Reason #1: Unresolved Childhood & Family Trauma

Whether you're home for the holidays or hosting family, Christmas is notorious for family conflict and arguments. Resentment for parents and siblings that we have held inside for years might come to the surface when we are with the people that contributed towards our trauma and affected our lives as adults. Maybe you were the scapegoat child in a family where your eldest sibling was – and still is – the 'golden child'. Maybe you feel pressured into spending time with a blended, post-divorce family where you feel like a stranger. Whatever the reason, we can find ourselves struggling to maintain healthy communication and boundaries that lead to people-pleasing to keep the peace and consequently, emotional exhaustion.

How to Cope: Interpersonal Effectiveness

This skill enables us to become aware of our boundaries between ourselves and others, teaching us how to healthily communicate – and maintain – them. During the holiday period, this might mean letting family members know that you will only be visiting for a certain length of time. Once the decorations are down and normal life resumes, interpersonal effectiveness skills in the workplace might look like setting clear business hours and learning how to communicate to your boss that you will not be working unpaid overtime so that you can create a work-life balance. Setting clear boundaries teaches others how to treat us and that there are consequences for when these boundaries are crossed. Maintaining our boundaries increases our self-esteem and the ability to show up for ourselves, which means we can rely on ourselves and our own self-regulation skills.

Reason #2: Lack of Routine & Self-Care

A solid routine and regular self-care is a vital foundation for physical and emotional health. During the holidays, these routines often disappear; we might skip the gym, eat foods that make us feel sluggish and have late nights that may involve more alcohol/substances than we are used to.

How to Cope: Emotional Regulation

The main purpose of this skill aims to reduce vulnerability to the emotional mind, to create emotional regulation. Following a week or two of excess or neglecting our basic needs, we often find ourselves emotionally and physically vulnerable – experiencing increased irritability, low mood and fatigue. This can overlap with an inability to utilize our DBT skills. Therefore, increasing our ability to meet our basic needs – such as good sleep hygiene, proper nutrition and reconnecting with nature – can equip us with the skills to regulate our mood going in the new year. .

Reason #3: Toxic Productivity

Once the out of office auto-reply email gets switched on, it can be difficult to switch off. Instead, we might switch into a frantic rush to buy last-minute gifts, prepare food and firm up travel plans. This can leave us getting lost in a holiday whirlwind, leaving us feeling scattered and exhausted by Christmas morning and dreading the return to work.

How to Cope: Mindfulness

This core skill introduces the concept of three states of mind that we find ourselves in at any given time: logical mind, emotional mind and wise mind. We might be working with a 'logical mind' when planning out a budget for gifts or coordinating holiday errands. When struggling with family conflict (as mentioned earlier) we might be working with an 'emotional mind'. Finally, when the gifts are wrapped and the dishes are cleaned and packed away, we might be working with a 'wise mind', which is a balanced state of both a logical and emotional mind. In DBT, mindfulness skills enable us to intentionally create a state of 'wise mind', in which we can utilize the rational 'cool' state of 'logical mind' to analyze a problem, whilst leaning on the ability of 'emotional mind' to feel the depth of both enjoyable and difficult emotions.

Reason #4: Covid-19 Anxiety

It's no secret that the Covid-19 pandemic has been a global crisis that has affected us all, leading to what psychologists are now referring to as a 'collective trauma'. Grief for lost time, loved ones and spontaneity can create a stressful and distressing holiday period for us all. Maybe it's your first holiday season without a close loved one, or maybe you've been experiencing anxiety about contracting the virus and becoming sick. Trying to keep up to date with government guidance, rapid[TH4] flow tests and possibly even needing to self-isolate can lead us to feel lonely, angry or overwhelmed.

How to Cope: Distress Tolerance

In DBT, the distress tolerance core skill equips us with a rational process in which to understand and work through our emotions during a crisis, no matter how 'big' or 'small'. Paired with the ability to identify and observe our emotions using emotional regulation skills, distress tolerance equips us with tools designed to manage our emotions in a moment of crisis until we can resolve the problem.

One of these tools is the 'comparison' technique. For example, when faced with the anger of facing yet another holiday season in a pandemic, utilizing this technique would involve comparing your current situation to a past one. Sure, another holiday season in a pandemic might be distressing, but was last year even more challenging? Perhaps last Christmas was spent in lockdown – or you might have friends who lost parents to the virus and this year, you get to spend the holidays with yours. This technique is not designed to invalidate our present emotions; all emotions are important. This technique is simply a useful way to create a different perspective on a difficult emotion.

Another distress tolerance skill – 'radical acceptance' – reminds us that given any situation, we have a choice; we may not be able to change the situation, but we can choose whether to accept the reality of the situation or not. For example, hosting family members over the holidays may mean our home – and our 'safe place' – becomes messy, cluttered and noisy. We might choose to spend our week cleaning up after everybody, or we might choose to embrace the chaos somewhat. We can reassure ourselves that once we get our house back, we can have a (deeply satisfying!) post-holiday clean and clear out. We can accept the reality that our house might look like it was hit by a hurricane for a week, without needing to like it; for now, it is what it is.

Ready to get back on track?

These are just a handful of the many DBT tools and techniques available. DBT informed therapy is designed to teach us these skills to keep in our 'psychological toolbox', with the support of a [therapist trained in DBT](#).

By booking a free, no-obligation 15-minute assessment with one of our fully DBT trained therapists, you can discuss whether DBT is the right type of therapy for you and your individual needs. If you're unable to reach us in person or prefer to have your sessions in your own space, online therapy is something our therapists are fully trained in and able to offer. You can learn more about our available therapists and how to contact the, [here](#).