

Supporting Workplace Mental Health Over the Holidays

Participant Workbook

Workshop Date: December 2025

Facilitator: Brandy Zimmerman | Thriving Workplaces



Part 1: Understanding Holiday-Specific Challenges

The Six Core Holiday Challenges

- 1. Emotional Labor:** Serving others' joy while missing your own; performing happiness while depleted
- 2. Cumulative Fatigue:** Longer shifts over extended season; physical + emotional exhaustion
- 3. Financial Stress:** Working in abundance while struggling financially; pressure to spend on hospitality wages
- 4. Isolation & Loneliness:** Working when everyone else gathers; seeing what you're missing on social media
- 5. The Comparison Trap:** Instagram-perfect holidays vs. your reality; impossible standards creating guilt
- 6. Grief & Loss:** Holidays amplify existing pain; pressure to be cheerful while grieving

Which challenge affects you or your team most?

You're Not Alone

The data confirms what you're living:

- 76% of hospitality workers report increased stress during holidays
- 43% experience financial anxiety peaking Nov-Jan
- Holiday season = highest hospitality worker burnout rates

If you're struggling, you're not weak. You're having a normal response to difficult circumstances.

Part 2: Practical Strategies for Everyone

Realistic Self-Care: 5-Minute Resets

Real self-care during holidays must fit your actual schedule.

Examples:

- Step outside for fresh air (2 minutes)
- Splash cold water on face and stretch
- Take 5 slow, deep breaths
- Text someone who makes you laugh
- Listen to one song that energizes you

My 5-minute resets:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Warning Signs Checklist

Check any you've been experiencing:

Mental/Emotional:

- ☐ Feeling numb or tearful frequently
- ☐ Irritability or constant worry
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating

Physical:

- ☐ Sleep or appetite changes

- ☐ Unexplained aches/pains
- ☐ Getting sick frequently

Behavioural:

- ☐ Withdrawing from people
- ☐ Using substances to cope
- ☐ Calling in sick more often

If you checked 3+ items, especially across categories, you need support. This isn't weakness—it's information.

Supporting Coworkers

DO:

- ✓ Notice and name: *"You don't seem like yourself"*
- ✓ Ask directly: *"Are you okay?"*
- ✓ Listen without fixing
- ✓ Offer specific help: *"I can cover for 10 minutes"*
- ✓ Remind of resources, check in later

DON'T:

- ✗ Try to be their therapist
- ✗ Share without permission
- ✗ Minimize: *"At least you have a job"*
- ✗ Take on more than you can handle

Your Holiday Survival Toolkit

| 5-Minute Resets | Peer Support Phrases | Emergency Contacts |
|-----------------|--|---------------------------|
| 1. | <i>"I see you and I've got your back"</i> | 988 - Crisis Line |
| 2. | <i>"That wasn't you—that customer was awful"</i> | EAP: |
| 3. | <i>"Do you want to talk or just need company?"</i> | Manager I trust: |
| 4. | <i>"It's okay to not be okay right now"</i> | Supportive friend: |

Part 3: Strategies for Supervisors & Leaders

The Supportive Conversation Framework

1. NOTICE

"I've noticed [specific observation]. I'm concerned about you."

2. ASK

"How are you doing? Really—how are you holding up?"

3. LISTEN

Don't fix, don't minimize. Ask: *"What would be most helpful right now?"*

4. REFER

Share resources (EAP, crisis line). Offer accommodations. Follow up: *"Let's check in again Thursday."*

Conversation Scripts

Someone seems withdrawn:

Opening:

"Do you have a few minutes? I've noticed you've been quieter than usual. I know the holidays can be tough. Are you okay?"

If they open up:

"Thank you for trusting me with this. That sounds really hard. What would help you get through the next week? I can [specific accommodation]. Have you thought about our EAP?"

Closing:

"Let's check in again on [specific day]. If things get worse before then, please find me or call [resource]."

Performance has declined:

Opening:

"Can we talk privately? I've noticed [specific issue]. This isn't like you. How are you really doing?"

If they share:

"I appreciate your honesty. Here's what I can do: [offer support]. Here's what I need: [clear expectations]. Does that seem manageable?"

Someone is visibly distressed:

Immediate:

"I can see you're having a hard time. Take a few minutes. I'll cover for you."

After they've calmed down:

"What happened? [Listen] Let's get through this shift, and then we'll talk more if you want to."

When to Escalate IMMEDIATELY

Call 988 or 911 if someone:

- Expresses suicidal thoughts or intent to harm themselves
- Expresses intent to harm others
- You're concerned about immediate danger

What to do:

1. Don't leave them alone if immediate safety concern
2. Contact EAP crisis line
3. Notify your manager/HR
4. Document what you observed and did

Scheduling Compassionately

Strategies:

- Ask preferences early: *"Which days matter most to you?"*
- Distribute impact fairly—rotate who gets key holidays
- Build in recovery time after brutal shifts
- Be transparent about how you're deciding
- Offer choices: *"Christmas Eve OR New Year's Eve—which matters more?"*

Managing guilt: You WILL disappoint people. Remember you're making the best decision with limited options. Separate empathy from responsibility for their emotions.

Meaningful Recognition

What works:

- Specific verbal appreciation (not generic "great job")
- Time (early release, extra day off, later start)
- Choice (pick your schedule, choose your station)
- Financial (bonus, gift card)

What doesn't:

- Generic praise
- Recognition that creates more work
- Food as only appreciation when people can't eat it

Part 4: Organizational Culture & Action Plan

Building Supportive Culture

What this looks like:

- Leadership talks openly about stress (with real vulnerability, not platitudes)
- Mental health treated like physical health—normal to address
- Resources communicated repeatedly (not just once)
- Asking for help = strength, not weakness
- Mistakes during stress = learning opportunities

Practical Accommodations

Zero/Low-Cost:

- Flexible break scheduling
- Permission to step away when overwhelmed
- Shift preference survey before making schedules
- Quiet decompression space
- Later start after closing shift
- Day off after brutal shift

Requires Investment:

- Backup childcare fund
- Transportation vouchers for late shifts
- Healthy food options
- EAP benefits
- Holiday bonus
- Extra staffing

Holiday Planning Timeline

BEFORE:

- Share resources early
- Gather schedule preferences
- Set realistic expectations

DURING:

- Regular check-ins (don't wait for crisis)
- Visible leadership support
- Activate accommodations

AFTER:

- Debrief: What worked? What didn't?
- Provide recovery time
- Gather feedback for next year
- Celebrate making it through

Your Personal Action Plan

My ONE Thing

What I'm committing to:

When I'll do it by: _____

How I'll know it's working: _____

Who will support me: _____

Make it specific:

- NOT: "I'll take better care of myself"
- BETTER: "I'll use a 5-minute reset once per shift"
- NOT: "I'll support my team more"
- BETTER: "I'll check in with each team member individually in early December"

Crisis Resources

Save These Numbers

988 - Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

- Call or text 988
- Available 24/7, free & confidential

Crisis Text Line

- Text HELLO to 686868

Your EAP: _____

Manager I trust: _____

HR contact: _____

When to Use Crisis Resources

- ✓ Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- ✓ Immediate crisis or feeling unsafe
- ✓ Need to talk to someone right now
- ✓ Supporting someone in crisis

Other Resources

- **Crisis Lines:** 1-800-784-2433 or 9-8-8
- **Mental Health Support Line:** 310-6789
- **Drug and Alcohol Info and Referral:** 1-800-663-1441
- **Mental Health Services:** helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca
- **Mental Health Information:** heretohelp.bc.ca
- **Free Wellness Program:** bouncebackbc.ca

Notes & Reflections

What resonated most:

Questions I still have:

Ideas to bring back to my workplace:

People I want to share this with:

Final Thoughts

The holidays will be hard. You'll be tired, you'll miss things that matter, you'll deal with difficult situations.

But taking care of yourself and your team isn't optional—it's essential.

You can't pour from an empty cup. Small acts of care matter more than you know.

You're not alone in this. Support each other. Reach out when you need help.

Take care of yourself. You matter—not just for what you do, but because you matter as a human being.

Questions? Need support?

Email: team@thrivingworkplaces.ca

Website: www.thrivingworkplaces.ca