

Ep. 76: Holiday Stress

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended.

Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. My name is Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Howard. 960th COG SEL, and today with me, I have... Francis Martinez, 960th Cyberspace Wing Director of psychological health. Well, good morning ma'am. How are you doing today? Good. How are you doing? Great. So I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today. Um I you know, we're getting into the holiday season and things start to get crazy. Right? Well we don't want to use that. We're I'm just talking about hectic, right? I'm not talking mental health crazy. We're talking hectic, right? I just wonder if you could help me share with you some of our listeners uh with some tips on how to deal with that hectic nous, right? Because when we look at the holidays, there's a number of different stressors that come into play with the holiday season, a family, right? There's always that aunt or uncle that has there too since they had everything right and then there's uh you know the meeting expectations, those that been said, those that have not been the gift giving season. Children's the holiday is the food. Um you know, and then of course, uh you know, some of the emotional things that come with all of that stuff, but yeah, so there's holiday blues, we've talked about that before. Um you know, sometimes just that seasonal depression kind of person, um around the end of thanksgiving and then pushes into the New Year. We've seen that. Um but you know, one of the things that we've talked about before we started recording was, you know, the whole expectations of gift giving, right, and what does that look like and not putting yourself in debt? Because we've seen finances, especially in today's environment with um, you know, the lack of work or people not being losing their jobs. Um you know, it's putting a strain on people finances. Um and so it's funny that we're talking about this because a couple of days ago I was talking with someone and um, you know, a \$10 gift, you know, versus \$100 gift, right? Well if one person works and only makes email \$7 an hour, that gift is worth an hour and a half of their time that they're giving you, right? So it's just putting things into perspective and looking at the person who's giving the gift, not necessarily the gift that you're giving or receiving, right? No, I think that's always a hard balance, right? Is uh sometimes we don't take that into perspective when we're looking at the gift that's given or even the gift that you're giving. I know that when I was a young airman being poor and I was so poor um it's how do I get the right gift for my spouse? How do I give my Children something that's meaningful? Right. What I've learned over time is even, you know, working with as a group, right? So as a family uh so right now for larger gifts, you know, things that are really over \$100 or more, what we tend to do is we get the grandparents involved, we get ourselves involved and everybody has a piece of that and say, okay, this is from all of us to you for that, that one gift that that has

an extra umph to it, right uh so that we can get around some of that debt problem. Yeah, that's a nice way of having getting other people involved in giving something meaningful. Um You know, I have four kids, so it's a little bit more challenging to, and they range from a large difference of age, you know, so it's a little bit challenging right to have to give what you can or what you want to. Um But I try and stay away from feeling like I have to give everything that they asked for me, it's not about the gifts, you know granted I want my kids to value what they're getting and you know, have that that joyous moment of opening something, but I'm very equal across the board. So if I get four gifts, everyone gets like the same realm, like everyone gets a set of pajamas, everyone gets a stuffed animal everyone gets and then they each get their, you know, nice gift right now and what we try to do as well is keep that balanced right? So no one can get something more grandiose than the other and balance it out. And I think another thing that I've learned in my number of years of being a parent is, uh, you know, communication right? You know, throughout the year explaining, okay, hey, here's what the expectation is, here's what the reality is. How do we balance that out? And then also, um, and any one of these big, big moment. So let's say like Christmas, um, it's understood that it's not about the gift, it's about, you know, the specific, and it's about the art of giving, right. The importance is that someone took the time, the effort to provide this with you and being gracious and understanding of what you got. It's not specifically, that's what I wanted necessarily or specifically that I had to get something. It was the fact that someone had enough care about them or caring about you that they both like that effort. Absolutely. And especially, you know, like thinking about stuff, you know, it's very hard for me, the shot for my dad. Like he has everything. Um, and so I'm like trying to find something meaningful to give. So I was like, well maybe I'll just make him the calendar with all his cars of these ever, you know, something small and simple. Um, but my husband and I, we really don't give each other gifts anymore. Like we've been married almost 21 years. So it's just like, well we'll buy whatever we want throughout the here. And so it's just like something small, like a pair of socks or just to have that engagement letting the kids pick something for us to open. No, I completely understand. Right? So you know, that spouse full thing is always difficult. You know, younger relationships. It was always, you know, the head scratcher and the stress of, are they going to get what they like or being a good gift giver and you've learned, I'm sure over years and I have, it's, it's just mean, it's about listening for one for that small gift. So they individual toaster, right? Exactly. Or vacuum or wash or dry or whatever, you know, for the fire tool and me works. But yeah, just kind of going through that. So I, I tend to buy my wife's gift with her. Like, okay, so I know this is what you like. This is what I, I think you would like, I would like to buy this for you for Christmas beforehand. So it's already done and this year my wife was stressing out, She stresses out and I keep on telling her, don't stress out, I don't care, right? It's about you just giving me something that's all that matters. No, no, no, no, no, I'm like, okay. So she found out what she wanted to give me. And then she was stressing because it was like, okay, there was three different options. She was like; I can't buy it without asking you what it is, you know, without telling you to get the right thing. So come to find out, I'm getting a pizza oven All right, you have a hot dog stand and the pizza of it. There you go. Right? So,

you know, and it was great. It was more like, okay, so, and then we went to the store and we went through the different options. We figure out what was going to work best for us. We learned something together about the pizza ovens and we're both excited. So it ends up being a big win and then black Friday sale made a killing right on savings and everybody's happy. I still get to open the box, put it together and it's all good. But you know, but the communication piece of the point, I want to head out was the fact that, you know, in an effort to still be surprised, but an effort to break down the communication, don't be afraid to ask those questions. Um, so there it relieves some of that stress, especially in the holiday time frame, right? Yeah. And you know, moving towards the communication part, right? We're talking about families and a lot of people get together during the holidays and it can be very stressful. Um you know, some of the people that I've been talking to recently are, you know, feeling like um they hear a lot of negativity right from parents or siblings or just like comparison like, oh you don't do it as good as your brother or your sister, but look what they're doing and so that can be a real mood killer. Yeah. Well, understanding the baggage you're, you're bringing to the dining room table in these holiday moments do because sometimes you automatically click into and that's what you hear might not necessarily be what set. And then there's that passive aggressive moves that constantly happened in the readings and the miscommunications and next thing, you know, everybody's singing mashed potatoes on the plate, like it's uh, you know, they're trying to break it black. Black, you know, like gravy grandma, right? So it's kind of nutty. So in those times, right, we really want to acknowledge and understand the dynamics right, right? From a psychological health perspective and know that it's okay to take these breaks right now that it's okay to like step away, get some air, take a walk because you know, you have to want to take care of yourself and your family because sometimes, you know, it gets a little out of control for like the little kids and stuff and removing yourself from these situations, it's okay or even avoiding the situation that you know, is going to bring you added stress, right? I think there's such a pressure to get together and well we've been to grandma's house every Christmas for the last 15 years or you've got, you know, you still have to do that. Um, but setting boundaries right? Having those healthy boundaries with your family members and teaming up with your spouse if you, if you are married or your partner, so you guys are on the same page. And another thing I like to throw out there is, you know, realistic expectations, right? When we talk about those family gatherings, it's always best intentions; it's always grandiose and ideas. Um, and you know, always trying to remember what it was, like the best one, right? And avoid the worst one. And the harder we try to steer away from the worst one, it seems like you're just turning into the skid, but it's not changing the direction of the car and you just keep on going down that same path versus just taking a deep breath and then not being afraid to communicate with your family members right there are gonna be trigger points. Try to avoid those, but don't be afraid to set your own boundary and say, hey, look, got it, don't feel like pressing forward with this piece of the conversation. We're stepping away finding those little, uh, I guess mental health loops right to keep yourself out of that cycle. So you don't get drug into, you know, Uncle Barney's diatribe of why he hates this, that or the other and why you're the part of the problem, right? Especially in today's climate,

right? There are a lot of families that are having difficulties due to political beliefs, vaccination, beliefs, and pandemic related stuff, all of it. And so having, you know, maybe having those clear conversations ahead of time, like we don't want to bring politics into the dinner table or the family home during the season and is setting those boundaries as a family. So everyone's on the same page because the baseline is what love, right and togetherness, the baseline is meant to share and value and be thankful for the fact that we all are experiencing this, we call life together. Um, and when it comes to blood, you didn't get to necessarily pick them, but they're still your blood or even the friends, right? The extended family goes that you choose, um, share the love peace, take me breath and understand that everybody's not perfect. Yeah. Um, so there are tons of resources out there for our folks, right? Anyone can reach out to me. Um, and you know, if I'm not the appropriate person, we can point you in the right direction, we do have a new personal financial counselor with the four 33rd. So if you are concerned about your finances or as we're rolling into tax season, right? Because that's just around the corner. Yeah, there's something, you know, something that we can refer you to a military. One source is always a great, a great resource. Um, it's like a one stop shop, right? Um, that I like to say, but you know, we can definitely help with whatever, um, stressors that you're facing. Yes. And then also realized as a gladiator, you're never alone. Never. Um, and uh, you might not have a spouse, you might not have a partner or maybe any other significant involvement with people don't understand that at least as a gladiator, you always have us, um, you can always reach out to anyone in the leadership and reach out to any of the team and uh, we'll be there next to you to get you through the hard times of the holidays and don't be afraid. There's no judgment. It's all about taking care of this greater clarity in our family. Absolutely. And I think we're trying to, you know, to kind of lighten up the mood, right? We have the Santa commander Santa Colonel Janicki, um, seeing our bloody or kid during the UTA weekend. So it's just a lot of, you know, we're trying to lighten them and keep the spirits up and have a great time and celebrate with each other. I mean, Texas doesn't have snowballs, but we can always get the big marshmallows and get a marshmallow fight if we got to, just to get things going, marshmallows means smokes. So let's bring that pizza oven here and get some pizza and some sores when I season that stone may be right, like is it a portable pizza oven? Technically it is, yes, it's not, it's not getting built in the backyard, and it's going to be one of those small propane gases one. So yeah, we can get those details a little bit okay. But yes, definitely, you know, there's ways of letting off steam having a good time um and then reflecting on the positive and not getting buried in the negative. Absolutely. And one other thing I really want to touch on, you know, there's a lot of things that are happening, right stressors and then it leads to maladaptive coping skills, right? Like drinking and doing things that we shouldn't be doing, that. We know that are not good for us um and it has detrimental outcomes or it could have detrimental outcomes. And so, you know, if you are focusing on these maladaptive coping skills, let's refocus on some positive coping skills, if you're having issues definitely reach out to us or your leadership, we want to get ahead of these things before we have any adverse actions fully agree, right, everything is in moderation and everybody needs to understand a lot about themselves, do some introspect and identify what those uh adaptive behaviors are

looking like and knowing what the consequences are so that you can make the right choices and if you feel like you can't then reach out to us , right ? We're there, come over, take a walk with you at least have a conversation with you tried a few memes whatever it takes to get a couple of chuckles and uh I mean I can tell you from a personal perspective how many times um something that just made me laugh made things a little bit better. Right? So that the old school movie that's goofy. Probably completely inappropriate but definitely makes you laugh. It's if you can get that release those endorphins alone can make a bad moment turned into a better moment, yep and tomorrow is always an opportunity to be better correct. And I can tell you from my heart to all of the gladiators out there um that if I don't see you tomorrow then that will be a sad day. So I definitely can't wait to see you guys again. Um uh anything else you want to close out with? I don't think so. I think happy holidays um reach out to your folks and make sure that you're staying connected, whatever that looks like. So if its leadership reaching down to your people um if it's you know uh Airmen reaching out to your family members and just staying connected with those people, we found out, you know staying connected really does increase our protection against you know um suicide and um just mental health issues altogether. So that's what we're hoping for. People are reaching out just getting those connections established and rebuilt over the last two years. Right? No I agree. Um stay connected. Be a good wingman. The shields that we have for our Children are against our enemy, not from one another. So bring it down. Be a good wingman. And remember gladiators get out there and stab the enemies in the face through cyberspace.