

Individual Matters

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Newsletter — December 2023 Issue

The Holidays and Mental Wellness

“Our greatest joy and our greatest pain come in our relationships with others.”

- Stephen R. Covey
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Ten Tips for Protecting Your Mental Wellness During the Holiday Season

Despite the merriness and cheer associated with the holiday season, for many people it can be extremely stressful.

Here are 10 ideas to help you take care of yourself and those you love over the next few weeks:

1. **1. Set healthy boundaries.** A “boundary” is where one person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions leave off, and another’s begins. Boundaries are set with actions (not words) and by changing your behavior (not others’).
- 2.
3. Pick one or two limits that define what you will or won’t do this holiday season. If implemented correctly, you won’t need to tell anyone about them (your actions should do the talking).

4.
5. *Check out our discussion about setting boundaries here:*
[Video](#) or [Podcast](#)

6.
7. **2. Beware the extinction burst.** When you set a new boundary, don't expect everyone else to accept it right away. Usually, what follows is an uptick in old behavior.

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9. Here's the key point to remember: extinction bursts suggest that your new approach is working. Don't give up on setting healthy limits for yourself just because you get some pushback from your mother-in-law, boss, or toddler. For more about extinction bursts, check out this [video](#).

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11. **3. Take social and sensory breaks.** Extraverts seek out social interactions to boost their energy, whereas introverts recharge through "alone time."

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13. Similarly, some people enjoy the bustle and excitement of restaurants, parties, or mall shopping — while others are quickly overwhelmed in these settings. Understanding your own personality and sensory needs is vital for self-care.

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15. If you're an introvert, find time and a private place to "power down" so that you can reengage socially when you're at your best. And if you notice this need in others, don't take it personally; just give them space.

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17. **4. Check your "*shoulds*" at the door.** Avoid placing unrealistic expectations on yourself or others. Usually, everyone is doing the best they can. Focus on what you need from yourself – not what everyone else *should* be doing for you.

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19. **5. Be "great-ful."** Practice "great-itude" by focusing on appreciation. Direct your conscious thoughts to whatever lights you up. Make a list, review it, and burn it into your mind before Aunt Margot starts criticizing your son's haircut.

20.
21. Here's an approach that works for Dr. Katen: Ever since she was a kid, she has loved "Werther's Original" candies. She keeps one in her pocket, and when she is having trouble avoiding a negative thought, she pulls out the candy and eats it while focusing on how much she loves it.

22.

23. *Read her recent blog post about being “great-ful” [here](#).*

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25. **6. Sign for help.** Before leaving home, talk with your spouse, partner, or friend to agree on a codeword or signal that alerts them you are in trouble and need rescuing.

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27. For example, during social gatherings, if Dr. Katen puts her hair up in a clip, her husband knows that she wants him to come run interference.

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29. **7. Avoid discussions about controversial issues.** The world is awash in political, cultural, and economic conflict and tensions. Every day, it seems, another piece of information or development emerges to threaten personal assumptions and long-held beliefs, and to pit different viewpoints against each other. For the sake of your own peace and wellbeing, consider staying out of such interactions.

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31. Before attending social gatherings, prepare yourself with specific tactics to sidestep hot-button topics. As always, beware the ensuing “extinction burst” – and give yourself permission to leave if things escalate.

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33. **8. Limit exposure to media/news.** Have you heard the saying, “If it bleeds, it leads”? News stories are designed to reel in audiences with dramatic and promotional topics that trigger anxiety and fatalistic thinking. Watching the news regularly may undermine your mental and physical health.

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35. Revisit tip #5 above and try to focus on the more positive aspects of life.

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37. **9. Don’t overdo it.** Acknowledge that the holidays may not be ideal for kicking off a self-improvement overhaul. For example, is Thanksgiving morning really the best time to start a weight loss program? Despite your good intentions, you could be priming yourself for failure.

38.

39. But if you do decide to transform yourself over the holidays – and it doesn’t work – at least try to have some compassion and grace for yourself. It’s okay to begin again.

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41. **10. Laugh more.** Find ways to laugh and do it as often as possible. Watch funny movies or read your favorite comic

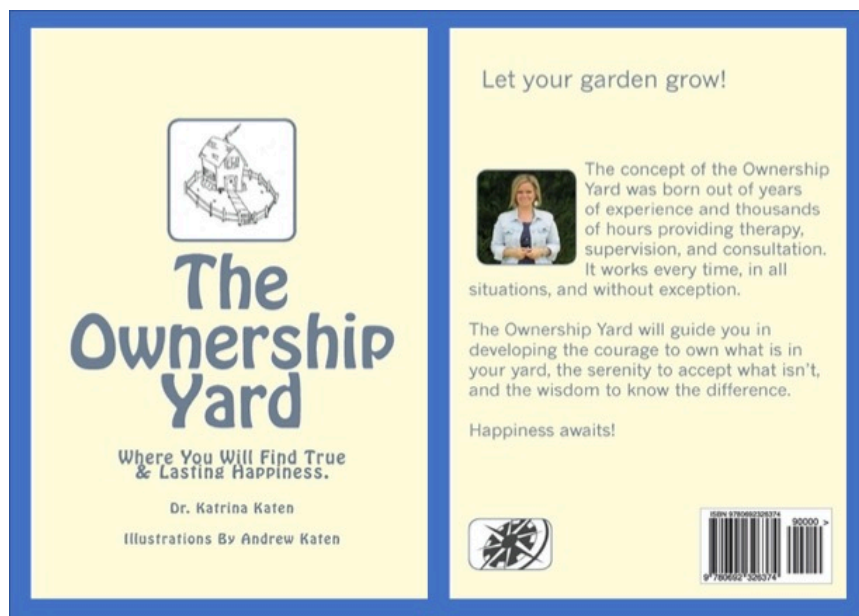
strip. Learn some new jokes (even corny ones), watch stand-up comedy, or get giggling with [laughing yoga](#). You will be amazed how quickly laughter elevates your mood.

42.

43. **11. Bonus Tip:** Don't assume to know what others think, or that their behavior has anything to do with you. As one humorist once wrote, "You probably wouldn't worry about what people think of you if you knew how seldom they do."

Looking for a Christmas gift for someone you love (maybe for yourself)?

Dr. Katen's book, "[The Ownership Yard](#)", is a quick, easy-to-read guide for how to take control of your thoughts, feelings, and actions — so that you can find happiness in all aspects of your life. Available on [Amazon](#).



Wishing you the happiest and healthiest holiday season, and a wonderful start to 2024!

All the best,



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