



# News Release

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Navigating Family Stress During the Holiday Season**

*TTUHSC Expert Offers Tips on Easing Tension and Prioritizing Mental Health*

The holiday season often brings joy and togetherness, but for some people, it also adds stress and strain to family relationships.

Nicole Noble, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, offered insights to help manage difficult family dynamics during this time of year.

Heightened expectations during the holidays can lead to disappointment and tension, Noble explained.

“We take so much time off from work, and we invest so many different resources — time, energy and money — in these interactions that we want it to be enjoyable and perfect,” she said. Noble added, “I think that we have ideas about how we're supposed to interact with others. And if we don't go to all the family gatherings that we've been invited to, we may feel a sense of guilt or shame of some sort if we want to take time for ourselves instead of spending the entire time interacting with family.”

She emphasized that self-compassion, healthy boundaries, self-care and compassion for others are crucial during this season.

“Take time to just breathe deeply, drink enough water, take care of yourself as you're navigating these stressful times. And know that they are stressful for people, that actually it's a heightened stress time,” Noble said.

For some, though, pre-existing issues within families can make the season especially emotionally taxing.

Noble said the hallmarks of toxic relationships include any type of abuse, extreme negativity and the inability to talk with one another in a calm, respectful and appropriate way.

“Certainly, if people are feeling physical symptoms every time they interact with a family member — difficulty with digestion, extreme fatigue, anything like that — it might indicate that we're in a toxic environment,” Noble noted. “We should listen to our bodies and the chronic stress that we may be experiencing.”

Noble also addressed the complexity of decisions surrounding estrangement in extreme cases. She encouraged individuals to prioritize their mental health.

“Sometimes it may be necessary if someone is abusive, if someone's not acknowledging past abusive behaviors, if we are feeling so torn down about ourselves that we can't have the self-esteem we need, then it may be appropriate to sever ties for a while.”

Noble acknowledged that while estrangement can bring relief in some circumstances, it can also evoke feelings of guilt and grieving.

“If you're feeling a deep sense of dread, of anxiety, of upset or turmoil surrounding this, it may mean that it's time to consider seeking additional help and identifying some new coping strategies, some new patterns of behaviors of communication that may facilitate better interactions with those that we love in our life,” Noble said.

Noble urged individuals to focus on what they can control and to be gentle with themselves during this season. She emphasized that the holiday season doesn't have to be perfect to be meaningful.