Family Survival Guide For The Holidays

All families have some level of dysfunction that is uniquely theirs. The added pressure and stress of the holidays is enough to spark a powder keg of family conflict. Limit the fallout and choose not to allow your holidays to be ruined by sticking to a few key points.

**Old wounds.** Don’t expect to heal past hurts and resentments. The holiday dining room table is neither the time nor place to resolve grudges and past wrongs.

**Alcohol in moderation.** Alcohol reduces inhibition. You are more likely to say or do something you’ll regret if under the influence. Alcohol also increases the odds of misinterpreting an action or statement. An innocent question about your work can sound like criticism when judgement is impaired.

**Don’t expect to change people.** Political, religious and overall personalities don’t change easily or quickly. Every opinion that irritates you doesn’t need to be challenged. Pick your battles and leave family members to their own belief systems.

**Exit stage right.** Designate areas in or around the home for a time-out. Take a break in the kitchen, bathroom or porch away from family may offer a bit of reprieve. If you are a guest in someone else’s home, set a time to bid farewell and leave the festivities.

**Structured time.** Conflicts are more likely to occur during unstructured family time. Having guests play a game, join in a sing along or watch a favorite holiday movie reduces the chance of undue arguments.

**Don’t take the bait.** It’s hard not to react with anger when someone says something hurtful. Remember, how people act and behave is a reflection of who they are and has nothing to do with you. Resist internalizing and taking it personal. Don’t get provoked into losing your cool and composure.

**Realistic expectations.** Life isn’t perfect and the holidays won’t be perfect either. Rather than forcing everything to be a picture of perfection, create small moments that are special to you. It may be sitting still with a pair of comfy winter socks and warm blanket, sipping a refreshing hot drink or simply watching the joy of others eating and exchanging gifts.

Remember to enjoy the presence of family, imperfections and all.
**Self Care During the Holidays**

It’s easy to put off your own self care during the hustle and bustle of the holidays. However, neglecting your needs can lead to burn out and ultimately not enjoying the holidays.

1. **Maintain your exercise routine throughout the holidays.** It may be helpful to exercise in the morning before demands of the day begin. Schedule it in by putting on your calendar.

2. **Run errands, don’t let them run you.** Build in space and time between errands to review your checklist. Limit the need for multiple trips by pre-planning and mapping out your stops.

3. **Get your sleep.** Late night shopping, gift wrapping and meal preparation can chip away at adequate and restful sleep. Chronic sleeplessness can lead to weight gain, irritability and poor focus. Eliminate caffeine after 2pm and prepare for bed an hour before by engaging in relaxing activities (e.g. reading, bathing, listening to relaxing music)

4. **Be grateful.** Feeling gratitude increases important neurochemicals in our brain. When thinking shifts from negative to positive, there is a surge of feel-good chemicals such as dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin. These all contribute to feelings of closeness, connection and happiness. Feeling gratitude allows you to enjoy the holidays.

---

**City of Milwaukee Wellness Resources**

- **Not feeling well?** Visit the [Workplace Clinic](https://milwaukee.gov/der/wycm) at Zeidler Municipal Building 841 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202 for FREE onsite health care services. Call 414-777-3413 or go to [www.milwaukee.gov/der/wycm](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der/wycm) for further information.

- **Free screening, consultation, and education services to prevent and treat potential musculoskeletal injuries.** Schedule an appointment with a physical therapist at the [Injury Prevention Clinic](https://milwaukee.gov/der/wycm). Call 414-777-3413 or go to [www.milwaukee.gov/der/wycm](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der/wycm) for further information.

- **UnitedHealthCare App** is a UnitedHealthcare (UHC) mobile app that provides instant access to your family’s critical health information, anytime/anywhere. Find a physician, check the status of a claim or speak directly with a healthcare professional. Search for UnitedHealthCare in your app store.

---

**Holiday Sobriety**

Staying sober during the holidays may be especially hard given family gatherings, holiday parties, and other social occasions.

Approach the holidays as just another day of your sobriety. Continue to work your relapse prevention plan; do what has been working.

1. **Stick to a routine that supports your sobriety.** Be sure to maintain self-help meetings and appointments with your care providers.

2. **Keep a list at hand of supportive people you can call.**

3. **Stay away from people, places, and activities that may trigger use.**

4. **Exercise regularly.**

5. **Avoid H.A.L.T-Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired.** These emotional and mental states are often triggers for relapse.

6. **Bring your own non-alcoholic beverage to the party or gathering.**

7. **Stay in the moment.** Put away the past and don’t fixate on the future. Simply enjoy the moment. Celebrate your sobriety one day at a time through the holiday season.