

Holidays & Special Occasions

The holidays can be a very difficult time for those of us struggling with alienation. The emphasis on spending time with family members we may struggle with, the focus on hanging out, catching up with friends and family and the emotional longings that come up for us, can present a whole host of challenges to maintain our emotional spiritual equilibrium. It is not uncommon to see an increase in emotions and negative coping behaviors as the season approaches. It is important to remember that holidays aren't all the folks that aren't there. When we can be our best selves in the company of others (even those with whom we may have had issues in the past), showing interest in family and friends rather than focusing on ourselves, we often find that joy increases, and stress lessens. Take a deep breath and ask yourself what kind of holiday you would like to have. What would you like to be different from past holidays? Imagine your life as you would like it to be in recovery.

Here are a few tools to help you have a more peaceful and recovery-focused holiday:

Taking self-care actions during the holidays

- Attend a meeting, be around folks who understand your pain.
- Get plenty of rest.
- We suggest avoiding alcohol to reduce vulnerability to depression and anxiety.
- Look at any distorted thoughts, often in the form of black & white thinking and catastrophizing, and work through these with a friend, sponsor, or therapist.
- Reach out to your sponsor or a friend in the program. Set a time to connect to be supported and support another.
- Anticipate situations that tend to make it harder to feel normally, such as travelling, family gatherings, situations where children and young adults might be around and plan accordingly. Be prepared to be flexible and take care of yourself.

- Make sure you remember to eat and hydrate yourself. Try to plan a healthy meal and not use food to distract or push away feelings.
- Continue with a sensible exercise routine but remember to be flexible. Structure is important, but recovery does not depend on rigid routines.
- Allow yourself some holiday treats (people you love and foods you enjoy). Deprivation is not self-care.
- Meditate, journal and practice some deep breathing to stay present and in your body. This will allow you to enjoy your family, friends and or quiet time
- Try not to compare other families to yours.
- Stay in touch with your sponsor and/or counselor if you are working with one. Talking about alienation pains openly with such resources is healthy and can help you prepare and plan for difficult situations.
- If travelling means missing your support network, arrange to talk by phone, email, or other means.
- Remind yourself if you take any emotional bait from the alienator it will result in increased anxiety. Be patient with yourself. Rather than dwell on problems, remain calm and then do the next right thing.

Standing on Solid Emotional Ground

- The holidays often bring up a wealth of unexpected (and possibly unwelcome) feelings. Notice your feelings and write them down for later consideration, rather than reacting directly with people who may be hurt. The holidays can be a great source of material for a Fourth Step.
- Develop willingness to look at things differently. Recovery is about acknowledging our grief, anger, sadness and a plethora of other emotions. The more work we put into our recovery, self-agency and practice with boundaries the better prepared we will be for holidays and special occasions.

- Avoid comparing yourself to others. Regardless if it's about appearance or life achievements, measuring yourself against someone else is not productive.
- Have a way out: If possible, drive yourself so you can leave right away and go someplace safe, or plan ahead and tell the host "I can only stay for an hour."
- Volunteer your services at a charitable organization. There are many people in your community who could benefit from your time and attention. Helping others is a great way to build recovery.
- Begin each day connecting with your Higher Power/higher purpose, or doing some meditation, even if it is only for a few minutes. This practice helps us gain focus and makes it easier to find our emotional footing during the day.
- Do not be afraid to set boundaries with others, and anticipate times and places that cause you stress. Be prepared and pre-plan choices regarding events you will and won't attend. Stand by your decisions.
- Recognize there are things you can, and cannot, control about the holidays: you can't control people, the calendar, time, or the weather. However, you can control your reactions to others, the amount of time you spend with specific people, whether or not you attend a gathering, and whether you leverage resources that can help.
- "A meeting, is a meeting, is a meeting". It does not matter if it is a face-to-face, Zoom, phone, or online meeting. It does not matter if the meeting is big or small, your first meeting ever or your third meeting that day. If you haven't attended a particular meeting before, try logging in a few minutes early or consider staying late so you can connect directly with others. Even if you are "just listening", you are likely to find people who have been through something like what you are experiencing.

- Use recovery tools (see "Recovery Tools" and "Additional Suggestions for Recovery" on the publications tab at PA-A.org)
- Use "bookends": Talk with a support person before you attend an event, then check in again afterwards. Call others if your "bookend" person is not available, and call if you feel overwhelmed.
- Hug someone and share a laugh every day. Radiating kindness can go a long way toward making you, as well as others, happy.
- Remember we all have a right to our feelings. Handling emotions in a safe and responsible manner makes the world a safer place for all concerned. This usually takes much training, practice, and patience. Our family members may be struggling with their emotions also. The holidays are a great time to practice tolerance.
- Try to maintain a sense of humor.
- Be appreciative of others' efforts at social gatherings. Quiet expressions of sincere appreciation are usually very welcome.
- Make a gratitude list daily: it is important to reflect on what is good and right in our world, and it is also important to remind ourselves of what is good and right about what we, ourselves, are doing.
- Remember to compliment yourself for being patient, tolerant, and flexible.
- Remember life is short: even the most difficult people will only be with us for a short time.
- Consider writing a letter to at least one person who has touched your life in a significant way during the past year. Not only does this give the person the amazing gift of knowing how they touched you, but it can also benefit you by reinforcing your relationship to an important source of support, and reminding yourself how far you have come in your recovery.
- Plan self-care time to regenerate, relax, and refocus on your recovery. This may be taking a walk, going to the movies, listening to music, calling a friend in recovery, meditating, or anything else that gives you time out to recharge.

- Go to P-A meetings, read the literature, and work the Steps with a sponsor.. Others' experience, strength, and hope can transform and strengthen our own recovery.
- Make a self-soothing/self-care plan and stick to it.
- Remember to breathe!

When we were mired in the depths of the ramifications of struggling with Parental Alienation it's useful to reach out to a fellow member. As we began to walk the path of recovery, we found that there were many others who understood what we were going through and were more than willing to lend whatever support they could to help us recover. During the holiday season we make an extra effort to connect with members of our support network.

Keep in mind the holidays are a season, not a lifetime. Normalcy will eventually resume.

We hope you take this opportunity to celebrate the holidays, and also your life in recovery.

Remember that it is only you who remains responsible for your health and recovery, not family, friends, partners, or sponsors.

For more information, please see "Recovery Tools" and "Additional Suggestions for Recovery" please visit "recovery and resources" on our website PA-A.org.

Helpful Hints for the Holidays

For more information please visit our website at:

www.PA-A.org

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