

Maintaining Sobriety Around the Holidays Tip Sheet

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HOW TO HANDLE SEEING FAMILY MEMBERS THAT MIGHT BE TRIGGERING:

- **Do what you can to prepare ahead of time.** Make a plan to limit your exposure to these family members- for example, if you know certain family members are more triggering at night, set up a time in the afternoon to see them and make other plans at night.
- If they trigger you by encouraging you to use substances, leave the area if they will not take no for an answer, or consider not seeing them at all if they do not respect your sobriety
- If they trigger you by causing increased stressed or mental pain, **limit your time with them to a specific and time-limited activity.**

TACTICS FOR MAINTAINING SOBRIETY AT A HOLIDAY PARTIES WHERE THERE MIGHT BE DRINKING OR OTHER SUBSTANCE USE:

- **Bring your own drink-** make a virgin version of a cocktail, bring a favorite non-alcoholic beverage, put it in a water bottle or drink container and do not put that container down. It may feel awkward at first to carry it around, but it means that as soon as you are triggered to pick up an alcoholic drink, you have a drink in your hand that can satisfy that urge without engaging in substance use.
- **Similarly, have gum on hand or other snack foods that you can** carry around on a plate at the party. Feeling the urge to use any substance can be hard to ignore and can lead to impulsive decision-making. Having a satisfying and delicious food item, or having a long-lasting one such as gum, will help to keep your mouth occupied, your brain satisfied, and you distracted.
- **Bring someone with you who you can trust,** someone you can confide in when you feel the urge to drink, and who will support you without judging you if you start to struggle. Also, its an added bonus if that someone will get you out of there if you start to lose conviction to stay sober
- If you know a party will have a substance available that you are recovering from, **consider not going and planning to see any important people in a different setting at a later time.** Or, if you do decide to go, **create a time limit or make plans that require you to leave within a certain time frame.** The longer you expose yourself to a substance you are working to stay away from, the more chances you give yourself to relapse.

HOW TO GIVE YOURSELF GRACE IF THINGS DON'T GO AS PLANNED AND YOU RELAPSE:

- **Relapse is part of the process for recovery. It is not unusual and does not have to be a crisis.** Generally, if you relapse, there are a couple of important ways to think about the relapse to help you stay on track
 - **First, view it as a learning experience.** A relapse can help us recognize vulnerabilities we were not aware of before. We can use those experiences to learn about ourselves and avoid putting ourselves in the same risky position in the future.
 - **Second, avoid the abstinence-or-bust mindset.** This mindset tells us if we messed up once, we may as well keep using because we already failed once. Avoid thinking this way. If you relapse and bounce back, this demonstrates control over the addiction you are recovering from. It is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you relapse and you continue to use, you are putting yourself at the mercy of a substance that you have a good reason to stay away from. Your recovery journey can include relapses and still be a success; don't let the story end with a relapse.
- **Talk about it with someone who you trust who will not judge you, but will hold you accountable.** Telling someone can help remove the shame that sometimes is felt after relapse. Feelings of shame and secrecy are more likely to lead to additional substance use in the future, while honesty and accountability without judgment will encourage continued recovery and growth.

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR TEEN WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH SUBSTANCE USE OVER THE HOLIDAYS:

- **Partner with them over the holidays** - if they have been addicted or are struggling to overcome an addiction, agree to stay sober along with them over the holidays. Or, if you are not someone who enjoys any substances anyways, make an agreement to not eat chocolate, or drink La Croix, or play a game on your phone for the entirety of the holidays. This allows them to hold you accountable as you hold them accountable; this feeling of partnership is much more empowering for teens and leads to greater self-efficacy and feelings of mutual respect.
- **If they tell you about a recent time when they used a substance, avoid judgement.** Ask open-ended questions ("What triggered you to use?" "How do you feel about the use?" "What are your plans now?" "How can I help you in the plans you have?") and tell them you are proud of them for being honest. Avoid punishment, but reinforce the bond of trust and openness, as this can be difficult for teens who often expect punishment when they are honest about doing something they feel is wrong or will be frowned upon.
- **Get rid of substances in your house.** This is not just a rule for the holidays, but a good rule of thumb in general and especially when there is increased stress, more people, and more parties. Just as you would not keep alcohol in the house if a partner was struggling with alcoholism, do not keep alcohol or other substances in the house if your teenager is struggling.
- **Set expectations early and stick to them.** If the expectation is that they will be home by a certain time after a party, follow through on that, but set the expectation early and repeat it often so that the teenager is more likely to remember and follow through on it. Also make clear what the natural consequences will be if they do not abide by these expectations- and again, make it clear early and repeat it every so often.
- **Remember that your teenager is still growing and their brain is still developing.** They will likely not make the choices you would make, they will probably make some decisions that are frustrating or not well-thought-through, and they may have strong emotional swings. The best way to keep them safe is to build a strong relationship built on communication, trust, respect, and mutual accountability.

AVOID CERTAIN "QUICK FIXES" FOR STRESS:

- Things like spending a lot of time playing games on your phone, engaging in substance use, or watching TikTok or YouTube videos can feel rejuvenating, there is evidence to support the idea that they actually increase dissatisfaction and feelings of stress.
- **There are a couple of reasons for this:**
 - *First*, spending time procrastinating on your phone or with a drink in hand will likely lead to increased time pressure and stress once you put the phone down or sober up.
 - *Second*, your phone and substances give you quick hits of dopamine, which overwhelm your brain- the subsequent depletion of dopamine that comes after you put the phone down or sober up makes every task feel more daunting, more boring, and more stressful. Avoiding these quick fixes will generally lead to more motivation and greater satisfaction at the end of the day.