

Four things to do if you're in treatment during the holidays.

The “big” holidays are coming up. For the commercialized world, there is joy and happiness abounding, but for many people the holidays can be experienced as stressful, overwhelming and may even trigger trauma memories. Despite all these concerns, people in treatment for mental health and substance use disorders can experience a sense of “FOMO” (fear of missing out) or even guilt when we they are focusing on their treatment and/or living in a residential treatment program during the holiday season.

Four Ways to Make the Most of Your Treatment During the Holidays:

- 1. Prioritize Investing Your Health & Happiness.** It's essential to remember that your health and happiness comes first, and that the holidays and all the accompanying festivities you think you are missing won't be experienced as happy if you are not. Allowing yourself to “miss” this holiday season and call it an investment to heal and grow, experiencing the holiday from the lens of treatment will open the possibility to truly participate in and enjoy all the holidays to come. Remember that if you don't make this investment, the best-case scenario is more years of stressful, overwhelming holidays, and the worst-case scenario is not being here to celebrate them at all.
- 2. Surround Yourself with Support.** When you are in early recovery, one of the biggest keys to recovery and relapse prevention is to minimize stressors. Diving full on into holidays without the support of treatment means that you are doubling up on risk. Increasing stress while decreasing support is a recipe for a bad outcome.
- 3. Accept the Gifts of Treatment.** For many people, holidays are associated with trauma and feeling unsafe. Challenge yourself to stay in treatment and embrace a holiday in a place that feels safe and is an environment where feelings are protected and processed. Give yourself and those who love you the gift of treatment this year. This gift is multi-layered:



Reflection. In treatment I will have the space to reflect on the holidays. What they have meant to me and what I want them to mean to me. I get to make this year the year I decide what holidays will include and how I will celebrate them.



Safety. In treatment I can distance myself from the triggers and risks associated with them. What if this year on January 2, I am healthier and happier than I was on October 1? For all the years I “celebrated” out of treatment – has that ever been true?



Community. In treatment I am surrounded by people facing the same challenges as I am. They understand the experience of holidays without substances (maybe for the first time) or without family, and they are not expecting me to be joyful or excited all the time. There is no pressure to feel or be a certain way.

- 4. Share the Gift of Recovery.** Make a list of the people whose lives would be improved by your health and happiness. Send them a note that tells them that the gift you are giving them this year is to become the person they want to spend all the next holidays with. Tell them that you can't wait for next year.