

# CONNECTIONS

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## Why it's so Difficult Working the Holidays in Public-Safety

**Public-safety is no easy job to begin with, but the holidays always seem to make it tougher.**

by Ryan J. Dedmon, **Operation 10-8** (Used by permission of the author)

Colored lights decorate houses with Santa's sleigh and nativity scenes in front yards. Decorated trees can be seen through windows in the living rooms of houses across the nation. It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. There is joy in the air and holiday cheer spreads through homes, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces... except in public-safety. So why is it so difficult for police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel to work the holidays? First-responders can experience something best described as the "Holiday Blues", or extreme degrees of depression and anxiety triggered by the holiday season.



Holiday blues can infect public-safety agencies and spread like a virus. Mental health professionals have their own theories about what causes the holiday blues, such as poor eating/sleeping habits, hectic scheduling, and lack of physical exercise. But these factors can cause holiday blues for any ordinary person, so there must be a better explanation for why the blues can be so pervasive in the public-safety community.



Happy Holidays City of Madison  
Employees and Family Members!

Tresa, Sherri, and I would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to the many of you who have provided us with feedback on our EAP newsletter over this past year, and recommended various books and topics for us to include in the newsletter to benefit other employees.

We support and assist many employees and family members each year as they face challenges that have surfaced in their life, and this newsletter includes some of those topics that are particularly relevant this time of year. This includes caregiving during the holidays, tips on how to save money, and a survival guide for avoiding alcohol consumption at holiday parties. We have also included an article specifically for our first responders who work over the holidays.

Peace and all good this holiday season!



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Public-safety knows no holidays. First-responders mount up to serve their communities 24/7/365. Christmas? New Year's? Just two more days on the calendar in public-safety. Violent crimes, tragic accidents, natural disasters, and general misfortunes do not take breaks on holidays. Emergency dispatchers still answer calls on Christmas. Police officers, firefighters, and EMT's still respond. And therein lies the problem.

The holidays should be times of joyous celebration with family and loved ones. People are kinder, more generous, more patient, more grateful, and more cheerful. That is what makes the holiday season so beautiful. It briefly transforms people as they find peace from the busyness of life. Dispatchers answer countless calls, but there is something different about answering a call from a homeless man on Christmas calling simply because he has no one else to talk to. Police officers respond to vehicle burglaries daily, but the family minivan that gets burglarized just before the holidays and has all the kids' presents stolen is somehow different. The firefighters who respond to a structure fire of a house fully engulfed and find a family standing at the curb crying in disbelief... the EMT's who frantically perform CPR on a baby who has stopped breathing, but to no avail... first-responders handle these incidents every day, but they feel different during the holiday season.

At a time of year when people should be happy, loving, and grateful, unspeakable acts of violence and tragedy still occur. This sociological dichotomy is never stronger than during the holiday season. As a result, feelings of helplessness and guilt are often more intense for first-responders during the holidays. Sadness is still resonating from the last call when first-responders are needed for another one, and the sadness accumulates. It is exasperated by thoughts like, "terrible bad things like this should not happen during this time of year", thus creating deeper feelings of irritability and depression.

And yet, there is no easy way for first-responders to defeat the holiday blues because society desperately needs them to respond to emergencies, even on days like Christmas. However, society itself can help its first-responders by reminding them they are appreciated, especially during the holiday season. Remember as you are sitting around your dining room table surrounded by family and loved ones, eating the full-course meal, rooting for your favorite sports team, preparing for gift exchange that first-responders are working and ready in the event there is an emergency at your home. Let us show them more compassion and appreciation, for their job alone is difficult enough this holiday season, and just maybe, we can help them fight the blues. Happy Holidays first-responders! Thank you all beyond deserving for sacrificing your holiday season and choosing a life of service.



*EAP would like to acknowledge all city staff who have jobs that require them to work on holidays.*

*To those who give up their holiday to keep the city running smoothly or agree to be on call for unexpected weather events or repairs, we thank you!*



# Holiday Hints

## Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

Holidays can be meaningful, enriching times for both the person with Alzheimer's disease and his or her family. Maintaining or adapting family rituals and traditions helps all family members feel a sense of belonging and family identity. For a person with Alzheimer's, this link with a familiar past is reassuring. The tips below can help you and the person with Alzheimer's visit and reconnect with family, friends, and neighbors during holidays.

### Finding the Right Balance

Many caregivers have mixed feelings about holidays. They may have happy memories of the past, but they also may worry about the extra demands that holidays make on their time and energy. Here are some ways to balance doing many holiday-related activities while taking care of your own needs and those of the person with Alzheimer's disease:

- Celebrate holidays that are important to you. Include the person with Alzheimer's as much as possible.
- Set your own limits, and be clear about them with others. You do not have to live up to the expectations of friends or relatives. Your situation is different now.
- Involve the person with Alzheimer's in simple holiday preparations, or have him or her observe your preparations. Observing you will familiarize him or her with the upcoming festivities. Participating with you may give the person the pleasure of helping and the fun of anticipating and reminiscing.
- Encourage friends and family to visit even if it's difficult. Limit the number of visitors at any one time, or have a few people visit quietly with the person in a separate room.
- Prepare quiet distractions to use, such as a family photo album, if the person with Alzheimer's becomes upset or overstimulated.
- Try to avoid situations that may confuse or frustrate the person with Alzheimer's, such as crowds, changes in routine, and strange places. Also try to stay away from noise, loud conversations, loud music, lighting that is too bright or too dark, and having too much rich food or drink (especially alcohol).
- Find time for holiday activities you like to do. If you receive invitations to celebrations that the person with Alzheimer's cannot attend, go yourself. Ask a friend or family member to spend time with the person while you're out.

**The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center** is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

### Preparing Guests

Explain to guests that the person with Alzheimer's disease does not always remember what is expected and acceptable. Give examples of unusual behaviors that may take place such as incontinence, eating food with fingers, wandering, or hallucinations.

- If this is the first visit since the person with Alzheimer's became severely impaired, tell guests that the visit may be painful. The memory-impaired person may not remember guests' names or relationships but can still enjoy their company.
- Explain that memory loss is the result of the disease and is not intentional.
- Stress that the meaningfulness of the moment together matters more than what the person remembers.

### Preparing the Person with Alzheimer's

Here are some tips to help the person with Alzheimer's disease get ready for visitors:

- Begin showing a photo of the guest to the person a week before arrival. Each day, explain who the visitor is while showing the photo.
- Arrange a phone call for the person with Alzheimer's and the visitor. The call gives the visitor an idea of what to expect and gives the person with Alzheimer's an opportunity to become familiar with the visitor.
- Keep the memory-impaired person's routine as close to normal as possible.
- During the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, guard against fatigue and find time for adequate rest.



For more ideas on how both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's can experience less stress and more enjoyment this holiday season, click on these links:

- ✓ Caregiving and the holidays: from stress to success!
- ✓ Help for the Holidays

# Five Steps to Avoid Going Broke Over the Holidays

## And how it will improve your happiness

by Michael Kay, [PsychologyToday.com](http://PsychologyToday.com) (Used by permission of the author)

Halloween is over, but for some, the real nightmare approaches.

The holidays—when we most want to promote peace, happiness, and gratitude—have become a financial war zone, leaving our bank accounts and credit cards in need of CPR.

We stress out online or in the stores, racking up debt in a vain attempt to make everyone happy. We have replaced the idea of sharing holiday joy with a catastrophic cash dump that leaves everyone but the retailers unhappy.

Isn't it about time for a new experience?

There's still time—before the madness begins and the holiday ads start in earnest—to make the decision to adopt a new mindset and create a more peaceful, happy and affordable holiday. Here's how:

### 1. Start with a spending plan (a sexier name for budget).

Your goal is to come up with a spending plan that won't put you in a financial straight-jacket. How much can you allocate from your savings or income to make the holidays work? Beginning with that end in mind will avoid runaway spending and the misery that brings. Once you've settled on the amount, you can begin thinking about the people on your list—what gift would be most special to each of them? Remember, your spending plan is not a suggestion, it is a fixed number.

### 2. Get on the "Expectation" train.

It's wonderful that you have created your spending plan, but it might bump fiercely against the expectations of others. Just like any project, getting all your stakeholders together to discuss and set expectations is crucial. Before the chaos begins, gather your family and talk about the plan—why it's important and how they can add to the success of the plan. This way everyone has a given task, set of chores or responsibility to make the holiday a treasured part of life. Begin with a simple question: what would make this holiday special and memorable?

### 3. Prepare, prepare, prepare.

Like anything we do in life, it's better to show up prepared. That might involve thoughtful research and careful communications. Think "genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration" and make a plan. Deal shopping without a carefully crafted plan is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. You buy the great deal and only then think about whom it will fit. Better to sweat the details in advance than to pant across the finish line with nothing left in the tank to celebrate.

### 4. Pull the trigger.

Nothing happens without action. You've done the pre-work, you've set expectations and have done the research—now it's time to put your holiday plans into effect. Whether you're shopping online or hitting the malls, keep your spending plan front and center and check off each accomplishment. How much more fun is this vs. diving into the fray unprepared?

### 5. Stick with your plan.

You've devised a personal plan to provide maximum enjoyment with minimum stress. So enjoy each aspect to the fullest degree possible. After all, your loved ones are on board and that's all that matters. You can let all the crazies around you gnash their collective teeth while you enjoy this celebratory time.

By following these simple steps, you'll create a new holiday mindset for yourself (and your family). One that embraces the joy of the season and moves you happily into the New Year—without the dread of a stack of bills you can't afford.



# The Holidays: Survival Guide for Sober Alcoholics

## Why are the holidays difficult for sober alcoholics?

by Sarah A. Benton MS, LMHC, LPC, [PsychologyToday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) (Used by permission of the author)

The holidays can be a triggering and challenging time for sober alcoholics, particularly for those in early sobriety. But why? There are a variety of reasons and this time of year can prove to be emotionally charged even for non-alcoholics. The holidays can be bittersweet, in that while they may bring joy and celebration, they can also be like putting "Miracle Grow" on family dysfunction and unhealthy dynamics. Therefore, if drinking alcohol was the way in which an alcoholic coped emotionally with holidays in past years, it can be a difficult transition when they get sober.

For sober alcoholics who come from active alcoholic families, this time of year is generally rampant with heavy drinking that they may have been able to avoid the rest of the year. A sober family member can unintentionally hold a mirror up to their alcoholic family members and this can inevitably cause tension. The high-functioning alcoholic (HFA) in particular is able to keep many aspects of life intact. Therefore, relatives may not have realized the severity of his or her alcoholism and may minimize the problem or not understand why the HFAs need to be sober. Sober HFAs may be dodging drinks or surrounded by family members drinking socially or alcoholically and this inevitably can be a challenging dynamic to navigate.

The holidays are a time of socializing, work parties, excessive amounts of food, celebration and inevitably drinking. Being sober can often lead these individuals to feel left out or it may be a painful reminder to them of the good ole' days. Throughout the rest of the year they may be surrounded socially by a sober community or are able to set limits and boundaries around how much time they spend in drinking situations but they may not be able to avoid these environments during this time of year.

Many people compare their lives and families to others and to the depictions that they see in the media of the "perfect family". For those who are single, divorced, or having family problems, the holiday season holds a magnifying glass up to these situations, leading many to reflect negatively on their life. As I sit here writing this blog, a TV commercial came on stating that "This season is a time of celebration, family, good food..." - these images are powerful and they are everywhere. Therefore, it is important to counter these false images of perfection and remember that every family has issues and to have some acceptance of family flaws. Alcohol may have filled this emotional void for alcoholics and now that they are sober and alcohol has been removed from the equation it may lead them to feel vulnerable, raw and sensitive. It is important to note that there is a higher chance of relapse during the holidays and sober alcoholics and their loved ones should be mindful of this.

In addition to family holiday events, work and social holiday parties are a constant reminder to the sober alcoholic that they have to live and socialize in a different manner than those who can drink in safety. There are holiday functions that require attendance and it is important to have strategies in place that can help to prevent relapse and to minimize triggers. Here is a holiday "survival guide" for the sober alcoholic:

- Have an escape plan by bringing your own vehicle or figure out the available public transportation near the holiday event that will enable you to leave if you are feeling tempted to drink or uncomfortable.
- Ask another sober alcoholic to be "on call" for you to check in with during the event for additional support.
- Let someone whom you trust at the holiday event know that you may need additional support during this occasion or time of year.
- Find a tasty non-alcoholic beverage you can drink that will give you something to hold and may prevent people from offering you an alcoholic drink.
- Come up with a standard response as to why you are not drinking that may vary depending on the type of holiday event and if you want those in attendance to know you are sober: "I don't drink anymore", "I am not drinking tonight", "I am on medication and cannot have alcohol", "I am the designated driver tonight," etc.
- Be choosy about the holiday events that you attend and avoid "people pleasing" by saying "yes" to events that you don't need to or don't want to be at.
- Take care of yourself prior to these events: get enough sleep, eat regularly, exercise, relax, etc.

**Whether you are striving to moderate your consumption of alcohol or desire to abstain completely, there are several resources available:**

### Drinking mindfully

- ✦ [Mindful Moderate Drinking – How to Drink Less, Enjoy it More, and Reduce the Risks](#)
- ✦ [The Holidays and Healthy Alcohol Consumption](#)

### Staying sober

- ✦ [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- ✦ [Madison and Middleton AA Meeting List](#)
- ✦ [12Step.org](#)
- ✦ [Recovery Toolkit](#)



- Find new holiday activities and traditions that you may never have tried in the past which do not involve drinking alcohol (volunteer at a soup kitchen, go ice skating, have a sober get-together and gift exchange, see a movie, take a trip, etc.).
- Remember to create structure for yourself if you have time off (volunteer, exercise, make plans, go to mutual-help group meetings, therapy, etc.).
- Work extra hours if needed in order to distract yourself.
- Learn to say “no” if you do not want to attend an event.
- Put your sobriety first and realize that others may not understand what this entails, but that it is your number one priority.
- “Just say no” to rum cake!
- Attend extra mutual-help group meetings during this season. (Contact your local **A.A. Intergroup** for more information.)
- Be honest with loved ones if you are having a hard time and let them know how to support you.
- Remember that “this too shall pass” and there is life after the holidays.
- No matter how you are feeling, just don’t drink!



*Thanks for reading,  
we hope you found the information useful!*

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