

CONNECTIONS

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How to Be a Secure Base of Attachment for the Holidays

By Hal Shorey, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

Understanding attachment processes can help you enjoy your friends and family.

It's holiday season again and time for family gatherings, happiness, and good cheer. At the same time, the season is full of expectations for happiness, closeness, and reconnection that many people fear will never come. Others fear these things will come and try to think of reasons to run away and hide. In any case, some of our relatives and friends are bound to be squirrely (meaning that they are feeling emotionally off balance but can't quite figure out why), some may be anxious or forlorn, and others may be downright irritable or agitated. Of course, most of them will attempt to hide these negative feelings because they know that society expects them to be happy and cheerful around the holidays.

So what can you do to help your loved ones enjoy each other and your company?

Be a secure base for the holidays

A secure base is a function. It is something you do—something you provide. People who were raised by parents who did a good job at playing the secure base role (about half of us according to the attachment research) will find that providing this function to others comes naturally. The other half of us will need some pointers, but it really isn't that complicated.

The primary function of the secure base is to reduce anxiety.

Parents do this for their children but we also do this for each other in adulthood.

When you decide to act as a secure base, you will be deciding to be consistent, warm, and responsive to those who join you for the holidays.



Season's Greetings City Employees and Family Members!

This month we have several seasonally focused holiday articles covering a variety of topics. We like to find articles that we believe will be relevant to employees based on current trends in EAP or identified areas of need in the organization, but sometimes we like to include articles that help us to look at life and the things we do a little differently and with more intentionality.

Examples of this in this newsletter are understanding the often overlooked benefits of singing (even if you can't carry a tune) and why to instead focus on enjoying yourself and the foods you eat this holiday season, rather than focusing solely on the foods you shouldn't eat or holiday food shaming. Wishing you had a supportive base to help you through some upcoming holiday gatherings? Read on for tips on how to go with the flow and perhaps consider what it would look like to BE that supportive base for others instead.

We wish you all safe travels and are grateful for the work you do to keep the city running at this time of year.

~ The EAP Team



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Here are more specifics:

Be consistent

In order to be consistent in how you respond to others, you will need to be calm and stable; not highly reactive to other people or to your own worried thoughts. In order to do this, you should know your attachment style, be it **secure, dismissing, preoccupied, or fearful**. Regular readers of this blog will probably know their styles. If you don't, just click on one of the styles in the sentence above to go to a post that will help you identify yours.

Dismissing

If you have a dismissing style, you are likely to be activated by people who you haven't felt that close to in a while all of a sudden wanting to be close, find out how you feel about everything, and exchange hugs. If these people are dramatic about it, you may have a particularly hard time hiding your discomfort or desire to turn away from them. You may try to find an excuse to rescue some appetizers from the oven or greet another guest. But, remember, people are likely to be anxious and feel under pressure to be happy at the holiday get together. If they pick up on your discomfort, they may perceive it as a subtle rejection, which will raise their anxiety.

In your secure base role, your job is to reduce anxiety in your friends and relatives. So, why should you do this? First of all, it's the kind thing to do. Second, you will be giving them a gift...the gift of feeling close to you. Third, if you stay pleasant (and present) and lower their anxiety you may help prevent them from getting squirrely, allow them to be their better selves and go on to explore their relationships with other people at the gathering.



Preoccupied

If you have a preoccupied style, you will probably be prone to notice when other people look uncomfortable or bothered. So, the first thing you will want to do is to turn off your emotional scanner. Before the holiday gathering, remind yourself that your threat detection machinery is just a little too effective. As I suggested earlier, some friends and family are likely to be feeling a variety of emotions at this time. Your emotional system could pick on these emotions in others as potential danger signals. If you tell yourself in advance that there will be too many cues to process, you can choose to ignore them. Yes! Just for now, ignore the data. It won't help you enjoy yourself or be a secure base for others if you are worried and anxious. And, most of the time, people's reactions have more to do with how they are regulating emotions than anything you are doing.

Fearful

If you have a fearful style, you may feel overwhelmed by being in proximity to all of these people. You may want to be close and long for connection, but you may also be worried enough about being injured emotionally that you hide in the kitchen or look painfully uncomfortable. It may seem scary, but remember, these events don't happen that often, and when it is over, nothing will probably have changed. So, any amount of emotional distress you feel between now and the time it is over will be totally unnecessary. Remind yourself that you can get through this. Focus on the other people and realize that nothing bad is going to happen.

Be available

Stay present and out mixing with your guests. Remember, they came to see you not your turkey or ham. If you are going to be available, you need to plan in advance so that you can socialize with people instead of being stuck in the kitchen cooking or filling people's drinks. And, how many of you ask a spouse or other relative to play host or hostess while you take care of business? Set it up so that business takes care of itself and you can be available to others.

Being available as a secure base does not mean being the life of the party.

Many of you will feel impelled to sound interesting, entertain, or tell lots of jokes. Some people will be truly extraverted and go in that direction. Others might increase their efforts to entertain or be interesting as their anxiety goes up. But you don't need to do that. It's perfectly OK to sit back (figuratively; don't go crash in the recliner) and watch others take on that role. When I think of this, I am reminded of one of my favorite authors, Dale Carnegie. In his book, [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#), he articulates how at one particular event he was feeling rather awkward and shy and didn't feel like

talking to people. So, he attempted to deflect attention away from himself by asking those around him questions about them. He found that most people were eager to talk about themselves. What surprised him the most, however, was that he later discovered that these same people perceived him to have been a wonderful and interesting man...even though he didn't talk much about himself at all!

Dale Carnegie realized some simple truths: that when you take an interest in getting to know about others, they will feel warmer toward you; that people generally like talking about themselves and will associate the positive emotions they feel with you. So, think in advance about lots of questions to ask people and see if you can carry a conversation by keeping them talking. You might notice that their emotions are positive, they are less anxious, and that you feel less anxious too.

Be Warm

First, it's only a few days and it won't kill you...I promise.

Second, if you focus on giving warmth and care to others, you should become less concerned with what you are getting in return. As a secure base, your focus will be on giving, not getting. This may be pretty tough for some of us from more strained childhoods to get. Some of us will have that secret wish that this year it will happen. The family and friends will finally give us the acceptance, love, and warmth we deserve. But this wish keeps us focused on negative outcomes and ready for disappointment. The sad fact is that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior and next week will probably be like last week in that regard. To overcome setting ourselves up like this, it can help to tell yourself that you are the mature adult in this situation (even if you are the younger person).

If you have a relative who is somewhat abrasive or judgmental and you view yourself as a peer or younger person, you are likely to feel hurt and bothered. If, on the other hand, you view this person as somehow wounded and fragile, it may help you have some compassion for them.

Try being extra kind to that person. Listen to his/her story and show interest, ask about how they see things, and, remember, you don't have to get anything from this person. Ironically, if you focus on helping others reduce their anxiety by being consistent, responsive, and warm, they will appreciate you more for it. By letting go of what you will get out of the exchange, you are probably much more likely to receive good things in the end.

Be Responsive

Being responsive also necessitates knowing yourself. If you have overly high expectations for what others will bring you or how much cheer they will offer, then you will be setting your emotional self up for disappointment and anxiety. Try to set your expectations for what YOU will bring to others and how much cheer YOU will offer. And then be content to let other people be themselves. This will help you regulate your emotional state so that you can stay emotionally present and respond to others just as they come.

Being responsive therefore entails knowing your audience and responding to them appropriately. Some people will be melancholy over the holidays. In my own life, for example, decorating the Christmas tree always triggers a tinge of sadness and loss for a mother who passed away decades ago and for Christmas ornaments I made as a child that did not survive my journey into adulthood. Fortunately, I can communicate openly with my wife and children and they know this about me. So, instead of getting annoyed, they respond supportively and allow me to have my feelings. By extension, I don't feel judged, irritated or anxious. The feeling lasts for a bit and then it dissipates. And, before you know it, I am happy again decorating the tree with my family.

I know that many of you can think of examples, where a person in my position would be criticized for not being cheerful and maybe even accused of being self-centered and uncaring about others. In this instance, the person(s) delivering that message would not be responsive to others. They would not be responsive to their own internal needs for validation and appreciation. That person would not be acting as a secure base.

The secure base will be there in a supportive way to allow other people to have their feelings. The secure base will be there with you, will consistently acknowledge and validate those feelings, and will respond in a non-critical and warm manner. Then, the secure base might offer some gentle comfort or uplifting encouragement.

The number one rule of cheering someone up is to first acknowledge and validate their true emotions.

Only then will the person perceive that you authentically care and are not just trying to regulate your own emotions by having the other person fake cheerfulness.

One final thing that will help you be a secure base and respond in a consistently warm and supportive manner is to know your audience. Can you identify your loved ones' attachment styles and anticipate how they process social situations? If you can, you should be able to contribute to their experience of peace and security around the holidays.

Five Healthy Holiday Boundaries for Givers

By Shawn M. Burn, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

Are your high standards and giving nature creating holiday stress?

Having good boundaries around our giving and doing for others is a persistent challenge for many of us (see my book [Unhealthy Helping: A Psychological Guide to Overcoming Codependency, Enabling, and Other Dysfunctional Giving](#)). This challenge is kicked up during the holidays. After all, the holidays are supposed to be about giving and spending time with family and friends so there are high expectations for our selflessness and generosity, some placed on us by others, but many placed on ourselves. Trying to meet those expectations can challenge our emotional, physical, and financial resources.

Holiday boundary setting is one solution but admittedly, it's complicated. When our holiday role is to make the season "merry and bright" for everyone else, setting boundaries comes with the fear of disappointing others and "ruining" their holiday.

Holiday boundary setting is further complicated when we fear it will create relational conflict (e.g., our parent will be upset if we don't show up for cherished holiday rituals). When we can't stand the thought of someone being mad or disappointed in us, or thinking we're selfish, we can let that interfere with setting needed holiday boundaries.

Perfectionism is also the enemy of healthy holiday boundary setting. People that want to do everything they feel the holidays demand and want everything to be "just so" are in danger of exceeding their physical, emotional, and financial resources.

So where does this leave the giving person during the holidays? Here are five things you can do to set healthy holiday boundaries.

1. Take an inventory of all you feel you must do and start pruning. Ask yourself: "Realistically, what boundaries can I set that won't ruin the holiday and will keep me from exhaustion and/or resentment? What can I leave out, delegate, or pay someone else to do?" Critically examine the "shoulding" and "musting" (e.g. "I must...", "I should...") that leads to feeling overwhelmed. Chances are that a little critical examination will help you recognize these aren't the absolutes you've been thinking.
2. Counter your perfectionism and lower your standards. As a recovering holiday perfectionist, I have to remind myself regularly that "good enough" is good enough for a lovely holiday! Most people won't even notice or care if you kick it down a notch, and if they do, they're usually supportive of our taking better care of ourselves if we explain in a simple and direct non-blaming way.
3. If you worry about people getting mad at you or judging you, remind yourself that most people will accept your holiday boundaries (if they even notice that you've cut back). If they get persnickety, they will get over it, usually pretty quickly. Remind yourself: "Their anger/judgment/disappointment is unfortunate and I wish it weren't so, but I can handle it, and they'll get over it. I need this boundary because [insert reasons here]."
4. If you feel guilty, counter your guilt with affirmations like these ones:

"It's ridiculous to insist to myself that cutting back or lowering my standards will ruin the holidays."

"I know they may be disappointed if I don't [fill in the blank], but it's better than overextending myself, feeling resentful, or being irritable, and if I explain, they'll probably understand."

"I know that I've always done X, Y, and Z, but things change, and we can have new traditions."

"My resentment makes me irritable and the holidays unpleasant. These boundaries are needed for everybody's sake."

"It's good for others to take up the holiday slack. It doesn't have to be entirely up to me to make the holidays merry and bright for everyone else."
5. Strengthen your boundaries by reminding yourself of the costs of doing too much. "What are the emotional, physical, and relationship costs of trying to live up to my/others' holiday expectations? Are these costs really necessary? Are they really worth it?"



To Give or Not to Give? Unwrapping Issues of Gifts at Work

By Liane Davey, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

When done with the right intentions, giving and receiving gifts is a wonderful way to create or cement a connection between people. When lopsided, or over-done, it can quickly become a source of angst.

Here are a few tips for your workplace holiday gift giving:

1. Don't feel obligated to give gifts to coworkers. Even if they give gifts to you, it remains a choice you make based on your relationship, your situation, and your finances.
2. If you choose to give a gift, choose a gift that is meaningful and not expensive. You don't want to induce guilt or make someone feel obliged to reciprocate. Something small but tailored to your teammate says a lot about how you value them. One of my teammates got me my favorite tea and a mug last year and I think fondly of her every morning when I drink from it.
3. Except in the closest of work friendships, avoid gifts that relate to personal style. If your boss never wears the orange and pink striped tie you gave him, you'll both feel awkward.
4. If you want to do something for everyone without breaking the bank, try buying one big box of chocolates with a nice card for the team. Or a basket of fruit that is beautiful and healthy and a great centerpiece for a team meeting.
5. For the boss: if your boss is generous and supportive of you, it's entirely appropriate to give him/her a small gift. Understand that it might be difficult for the boss to give a gift to all direct reports, so only give because you sincerely want to say thank you.
6. Any time you give a gift to a coworker (especially your boss), take the opportunity to write a card and share what you are grateful for. That will make the gift feel more authentic and more heartfelt.
7. Accept appropriate (but not extravagant) gifts graciously. Don't be embarrassed, be grateful. Acknowledge the gift with a handwritten thank you note.
8. If a gift is too large or somehow inappropriate, have the courage to say so. "This is a lovely gesture. It makes me uncomfortable that you spent so much."

If you're wondering, this is how I approach holiday gift giving. Several years ago, when I was managing a large team, it became infeasible to give gifts to everyone. Instead, I started a tradition of making handmade cards with a personalized note to each of my teammates. These small but personal tokens are my way of showing my teammates how much they mean to me.



Twelve Reasons for Singing

By Kate F. Hays, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)



Singing is good for us. In true holiday spirit, here are 12 Psychological Ways:

1. No surprise, given my passion about the value of diaphragmatic breathing to mental health and optimal performance: The first benefit that occurs to me is that, to sing fully and completely, you need good breath support. It not only produces good sound—this kind of breathing gives your mind and body the positive effects of more oxygen and more complete exhalation of carbon dioxide.
2. Unless you confine yourself to singing in the shower, singing means community and interpersonal connection. Choruses come together to work on a program; they have a sense of purpose that is larger than any one individual. Each different voice type and timbre is needed—the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The sense of community is also strengthened through the rhythm of chatting with each other, catching up during break times. Even with a different purpose, congregational choirs share these dynamics as well. When people gather together, even once a year around a piano or in full-fledged Messiah Sing-a-long mode, voices are raised together.
3. When you're singing, it's almost impossible to think about other things—the challenges of daily life, for example. You're focused specifically on what you are doing. Being fully in the present moment allows us welcome distraction from other thoughts, issues, or burdens. Singing brings respite and refocus.
4. Singing offers the opportunity for mastery, for a sense of learning, growing, and accomplishing. Even if it seems painfully gradual at times, practice gets you closer to perfect. You become more aware of what's involved in skill development, perhaps in an aspect of life different from your everyday professional life.
5. Moving more into the cognitive aspects of singing, memorization uses different aspects of our brains. It's something we're accustomed to do as children; as adults, we usually find comfort in clutching our scores while staring down at those black splotches on the paper. Memorized music, though, demands that we pay attention to what we're singing in a different way. In turn, we connect with our audience in a more intimate and direct way—there's no black folder between the singers and the listeners.
6. Singing is really a very complex process, involving various areas of our brain: There is the linguistic aspect which is different from vocal production which in turn is different from the sense of line. Add different languages and you get yet more synapses firing, more brain elements in full use.
7. There is the emotional aspect as well: What does the music say, how does the singer convey it, what does it evoke in our memories, whether about the music itself or some totally unrelated memory? Does the music bring us to tears? To joy? To laughter? Accessing our feelings through music is especially true at this time of year.
8. Song is a form of communication. A lullaby soothes an infant; it communicates "you matter."
9. Vocal music elaborates on the experience of meaning and symbolism that we encounter with poetry.
10. There is also the performance aspect itself. The process of rehearsal is both critically important and valuable in itself—but is different from performance. Performing isn't "just" about singing; it's also about singing to others. How does the singer prepare for that interaction? What are the mental messages and self-judgments that the singer makes, both in preparation and during the performance?
11. For some people, the opportunity to be judged adds a special sparkle to performing. The popularity of various kinds of choral competitions, involving formal judging, was the basis for the TV series, *Glee*, a program that further popularized competitive choral singing.
12. Finally: this blog has often noted the similarities between different types of performers, especially athletes and performing artists. One of the central differences, though, has to do with audience. I would argue that even though audiences are very much part of the athletic endeavor, an audience isn't necessary to the performance of the sport itself. With the performing arts, however, in a way performance doesn't exist without the presence of an audience. Perhaps this blog is relevant to you as an audience member rather than a singer. Your experience and your presence is vital and central to the singer's life as well. This is the broader sense of community; the interaction between performer and audience creates its own dynamic.



I sing with an auditioned chorus that, annually in December, goes to a number of local seniors' residence to "donate" a mini-concert of holiday music, CarolShare. Our audience is truly appreciative, even if sometimes impaired enough that we may not experience direct feedback. But this year, just after one mini-concert, a resident gave our director a sketch he'd made of the chorus as we were singing. Another time, the recreational coordinator thanked our point person and commented that one of the residents had come up to her and said, "Boy are they good singers." The point person smiled politely, thinking that while the comment was nice, it wasn't exactly a profound statement. The Recreational Coordinator said, "I'm not sure you understand. The woman has Alzheimers—she hasn't spoken for four months."

Sing and be merry!



Enjoying Holiday Eating!

By Nancy Darling, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

It's not what you eat on Thanksgiving that will get you.

For the last year and a half, I've spent more time than I'd like to admit on forums for people trying to lose weight. This time of year, I can tell you what the main topics are:

- **Fear**
- **Guilt**

Why? It's holiday time!

Let's start with a few facts:

Most people gain a little, not a lot, over the holidays. Stories about holiday weight gain often talk about people gaining 7-10 pounds over the holidays. In surveys, people say they gain around 5 pounds. The truth? Most people gain a pound or two a year. A pound a year will creep up on you—it certainly did on me. But one pound is not ten. And it's not something to be afraid of.

- It takes 3500 calories to gain a pound. Think about a pound of fat. It's easy—look at a pound of butter. It takes your body a lot of energy to build that volume of fat. To gain 5 pounds, you would need to eat 3500 x 5 (18,500) extra calories between Thanksgiving and Christmas. And I say 'extra' because that would be over and above the calories you need to sustain your daily activities.
- If you're already obese, you may gain more than average. Although the average person does not gain a lot during the holiday season, people who are already overweight tend to gain more. Among people who are overweight or obese, 14% gained five pounds or more.

Two things I've learned from the forums:

Weight loss forums have a lot of really good advice and very supportive people, and more misinformation and opinions than you can shake a stick at. (They also have their share of trolls and meanies.) Two clichés I've really come to appreciate on holiday weight loss:

- It's not what you eat on Thanksgiving and Christmas. It's what you eat between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It is easy—and maybe even good—to relax and enjoy a wonderful and relaxing feast on holidays. That's why they're called 'feasts'—they are extraordinary days of celebrating with food. What becomes problematic is not eating more than usual on those two days. There's only so many calories you

can put into your body on any one day! But eating more than usual on the 30-odd days between them can really add up.

- It's not what you eat between Thanksgiving and Christmas, it's what you eat between Christmas and Thanksgiving. Enough said. There are 320 odd days the rest of the year. That's what really determines weight gain.

Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Except cookies.

A lot of people love the phrase 'nothing tastes as good as skinny feels'. But it is just so not true. I love having lost weight. I wish I had done it ten years ago. I celebrate it every time I look in the mirror or take off my coat. But LOTS of things taste just as good: melted butter on toast, hot chocolate chip cookies, a really great steak, warm brie on a croissant...

Our brains respond to just thinking about food by sending pleasure signals. People who say they are not going to eat (fill in the blank—cookies, mashed potatoes, candies...) tend to be hungrier, have a harder time sticking to their weight loss goals, and more likely to overeat once they break their rule. "In for a penny, in for a pound."

The eating triggers: Beautiful food and lots of emotions

Many people eat—and overeat—in response to emotions. The holidays can produce both positive emotions that reduce anxiety and negative emotions. Eating too much - especially eating fat and sugar - are a common response.

Even worse, food can EVOKE emotional memories. Just as music or smells can bring back powerful emotions, so can the smell and taste of food. Some of the emotions are warm and wonderful - that's our image of the holidays. But for many people, holiday memories are far from ideal. Food can evoke negative emotions that we respond to by eating more food.

We also eat too much out of habit. See a cookie. Eat a cookie. Becoming more conscious of picking up that second (or third or fifth) cookie, can make all the difference between a treat and a binge.

Develop a plan

I love to eat. I love to cook. I love to plan. Coming up with a plan—or strategy—to enjoy holiday eating helps to keep holiday weight gain manageable.

- Recognize your holiday emotions. If you think about the emotions you have about the holidays—good or bad—it can be easier to separate those feelings from the food you've associated with them.
- Choose the foods you truly love. Don't go into a party with the idea that you're going to just ignore the buffet table and pass on the desserts. Come up with a strategy. Know your favorite foods and choose reasonable portions of those. Enjoy them. Then skip on the ribbon candy or those cookies that look pretty but taste like paste. If you're somewhere where the main activity is eating, take lavish portions of the healthiest foods there, and make sure to snag some of the high calorie foods you want. If you're still hungry - or want some more - there's still time for seconds on the best goodies because you haven't filled up on foods that you didn't truly enjoy.
- Don't waste calories on things you don't care about. Want those mashed potatoes? That piece of pie? Grandma's stuffing? Enjoy them. If you drink bubbly water before dinner and choose a lighter 150 calorie beer instead of the 400 calorie stout, you'll have plenty of room for them. One of the things I have really learned logging all my food is that some things have a lot more calories than I thought. And others a lot less. Spend 20 minutes checking up on calories before you go into the season and you may be pleasantly surprised at what you can eat—and unpleasantly surprised by some things you thought were healthy but are not worth the calories to you.
- Don't cope through avoidance. A great deal of research has shown that people who lose successfully—and maintain their losses (which is harder)—don't avoid any foods in particular. They DON'T make strict rules. Instead, they eat a variety of foods, but are careful with portions.
- Don't look back. One of the problems with setting rules for yourself is that once you've broken them, you tend to give up. Had a second helping of chips and dip before dinner? That's not a good reason to have a third piece of pie. You can always start over. What's behind you can't be changed.
- SLEEP! When people are tired, they overeat. Partly because they are up longer and have more time to do so. Partly because the hormone that tells you to eat is overproduced when you're tired. Partly because the hormone that tells you to stop eating is underproduced when you're tired. Partly because you're more stressed when you're tired because you produce more cortisol, which can also trigger eating. One of the best ways to maintain your health, composure, and weight during the holidays is to stick to a regular sleep schedule.

A study of college students showed that most of them gained weight over the Thanksgiving holiday—quite an achievement for a five day break. The problem, however, is not that people over-eat during that short period of time. Rather, people over-eat during the entire holiday period—an especially stressful time for college students, but a time of stress for many other adults as well.

Minimizing weight gain during this period, makes cumulative weight gain over the years much less of a problem. And a little planning can help.



Making it through the Holidays Intact

By Sandra Eugster, Westside Psychotherapy (Used with the author's permission)

Here we are again, the leaves are off the trees, there is frost in the mornings. And right in step we have...The Holiday Season. No one goes untouched. Some greet it with happy anticipation, others with dread, some do their level best to hunker down and ignore the whole rigmorale. Whatever your feelings about the stretch between Thanksgiving and New Year's, it's likely you are facing some disruptions, be it travel, house guests, spending time with family, or dealing with loneliness. What can you do to make it a time of more joy and less annoyance? Try these ideas:

Remember What You Know

Every family has its quirks, and all of us regress when returning to family, sometimes acting like the sullen teenager we haven't been in...years. If you think about it ahead of time, you can probably anticipate the aggravations you will encounter. Forewarned is forearmed. If you *know* your mother is going to throw a fit, or your uncle is going to drink too much, when it happens it doesn't feel like such a big deal. So bring your sense of humor, and make it your project to stay out of the fray. If someone is doing something that offends you or hurts your feelings, get out of the house and take a walk. Remember that you can always politely say, "thank you for asking, that's not something I can talk about right now." See if you can find one thing to appreciate about each person present, and remember, not everyone has any family at all.

Don't Neglect the Basics!

This is NOT the time to stop all those good habits you have been working so hard to develop. Be sure to exercise, meditate, make healthy food choices, don't drink or smoke too much, and get enough sleep. These practices will help you keep a clear head, and give you the option of making better choices physically and emotionally.

Train Your Brain

The most powerful thing you have is your attention. Whatever you pay attention to will grow and flourish. So train yourself to notice the positives, and let the negatives take care of themselves! We are naturally set to notice threats and dangers which, in modern terms, translates into negatives. Make it your business to reverse this and train yourself to focus on the positives. At the end of the day, pick out your three favorite things and write them in a journal or share them with someone in your life. Over time, this simple practice will train your brain to notice the bright spots and glaze over the dark ones.

Taking the time to reflect on these basic practices can change your experience fundamentally. YOU are in charge of how you move through your own life. Use your power to make your life better!

P.S. While these may be good ideas, remember, deep change is *hard!* There is no one-size-fits-all approach to *anything*. If you are thinking about these things, good for you! That alone paves the way for change. And Good Luck!!



*Happy Holidays
City of Madison
Employees & Families!*



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

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