

COPING WITH **DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR** DURING THE *Holidays*

When winter holidays come around, many of us begin to feel excited about putting up holiday decorations, binging on delicious holiday beverages and treats, or enjoying the snowfall. However, there is also a thorny side to the holidays that we often overlook. Holidays also happen to be the time for purchasing gifts for loved ones and having get-togethers with family and/or friends. While these activities may be great fun for some, many of us have that one relative or friend who has a habit of putting a damper on things. Perhaps, that someone is even you. This newsletter looks at how we can get through the holiday season especially if we have a difficult relative or if we have a tendency of becoming Grinch-like ourselves.

HOLIDAY BAD BEHAVIOUR

In a 2015 Healthline Survey on stress during the holidays, at least 62% of the respondents reported feeling somewhat stressed or very stressed during the holiday. The reasons behind their misery? Finances were the biggest culprit followed by purchasing the right gift and health/fitness regime. Based on this data, it is not a surprise that many people become especially grouchy during this time.

Examples of "challenging behaviour" that you may come across during the holidays:

- Tendency to be verbally aggressive and easily lose one's cool, especially after having one too many drinks
- Making personal attacks, bringing up past wrongs or wounds
- Arguing on sensitive topics, such as politics, religion etc.
- Placing high expectations on others with respect to Christmas gifts, holiday gatherings, or demanding that they commit all of their holiday time to their holiday plans



DEALING WITH DIFFICULT FAMILY OR FRIENDS

While we may prefer to keep a distance from our challenging friends or relatives, there may be various reasons for why you either cannot or don't wish to decline an invitation to a holiday get-together. Here are some suggestions that may be useful to store in your arsenal when such a situation arises.

Learn to Say No to Some Things

While it may difficult to say no to everything that your family and friends have planned for the holidays, you don't have to commit all of your holiday time to their plans. In fact, a healthier and less stressful option would be to make some plans of your own that you will be excited about. Tamar Chansky, a psychologist and writer for Psychology Today, suggests treating that gathering like business or work and planning other activities during the holidays that will be more like "play" for you.

Make a Plan

Therese Borcard, a writer for Huffington Post, advises preparing yourself in advance for some of the things that you expect would happen at the gathering. This can involve thinking of how you may respond to difficult questions or simply, coming up with a list of some innocuous topics to converse about, or even planning a few fun activities for all the attendees. These suggestions might help keep the gathering from derailing into uncomfortable, argumentative territory.

Don't Take Anything Personally

Sometimes, even with all of your planning, our loved ones can say things that are hurtful. Borcard says that it is important to remember that those comments aren't about you. Oftentimes, what someone says is a reflection of what they think or what they believe in, both of which are cultivated from life-long experiences. Ultimately, it is up to you to decide how much power you want to give to their words.

Don't Expect People to Change

A lot of our misery and frustration arises from wanting someone to change. According to Chansky, much of that misery can be mitigated if we realize that people may not change and that we don't necessarily have any power in causing that change. Instead, learn to adapt and adjust yourself to their behaviour. This doesn't mean that you are suddenly okay with the way they are behaving but that you make the decision to not let their behaviour put a chink in your peace of mind and holiday enjoyment.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE GUILTY OF BAD BEHAVIOUR



Think about the reasons behind your behaviour

- Are you stressed out?
- Does alcohol make you lose your cool easily?

Think of ways you can curtail that behaviour

- First, practice self-compassion. Instead of beating yourself up for your bad behaviour, focus your attention on making changes.
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Plan gift purchasing in advance and stick to a budget
- Take breaks, plan some alone time
- Remember that holidays should be an enjoyable time for everyone. Be respectful of different beliefs and avoid controversial, sensitive topics
- If something about the get-together is stressing you out, talk about it with a trusted friend or relative