

CREATING A CAREGIVING PLAN FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Realistic planning to get your family through the holiday season.

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CREATING A CAREGIVING PLAN FOR THE HOLIDAYS

REALISTIC PLANNING TO GET YOUR FAMILY THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

In our family the holiday season:

- Starts with Halloween and lasts through New Years.
- Creates dysregulation.
- Creates added conflict between the children. I have very competitive kids.
- Creates conflict with extended family and at times between my husband me.
- Causes us to split up and do different things to meet each child's needs.

In your family does the holiday season:

- Start early, and with what holiday?
- Create dysregulation and/or anything else?
- Create conflict between your children?
- Create conflict with extended family and/or your partner?
- Cause your family to split up and do different things to meet everyone's needs?

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- Define Holiday Season:
 - I am going to define it by:
 - A period of time where various holidays are celebrated with festivities and a change in routine schedules over the course of multiple months.
- How does the holiday season change your routine schedule?

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- Define dysregulation:

- I am going to define it by:

1. The human body reacting to stimuli that is creating discomfort for the individual and activating their nervous system's need for survival by either under processing or over processing the information. The mind and body are not Syrianized to escalate and deescalate to the stimuli/situation.
 - Fight, Flight, faint, Freeze/Flop, and Fawn/Friend.
2. The human body reacting to stimuli where the activated individual does not know how to self-regulate through the experience.
3. The human body reacting to stimuli that is not congruent with neurotypical expectations.

- Define stimuli:

- I am going to define it by:

- Any external or internal event creating felt energy within the body.

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- What is the best way to assist someone who is dysregulated?
 - By using co-regulation.
- Define co-regulation:
 - I am going to define it by:
 - One or more individuals work to maintain a regulated and nurturing environment to assist in soothing one or more individuals' nervous system.

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- How do you maintain regulation within yourself to co-regulate someone else?
 - Be ready to be open to change within yourself.
 - Changing automatic reactions takes time and repeated use.
 - It can feel weird or wrong when not doing automatic reactions.
 - Be ready to be flexible.
 - What you want and what needs to happen might be different.
 - Be ready to be vulnerable.
 - Admit your struggles so that you can make the needed changes to ensure the other person feels safe.
 - Be ready to pivot in the moment.
 - Dysregulation can be activated by anything, so what you think might be the reason and what is the reason might be different. This means your plan of action might need to change quickly in the moment.
 - Also, the intensity of dysregulation can increase at any time without any warning.

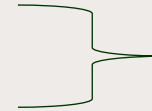
Jessica Turk, LCSW, (2023), Introduction to Co-regulate to Grow Program, slide 36.

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- Dysregulation and the holidays:

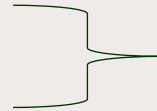
- How do the holidays dysregulate you?
- How do the holidays dysregulate your children and/or partner?



Grief, Conflict, financial strain, loss of routine, activates past hurt/trauma, increased expectations, added pressure, activates demand avoidance, overwhelms sensory system, mood instability due to depression, anxiety, seasonal affective disorder, etc.

- Co-regulation and the holidays:

- How do you regulate yourself?
- How do you co-regulate your children and partner?
- Have you taught your partner what you need for them to assist you in co-regulation?
 - With yourself?
 - With your children?



If not, then it's time to have a conversation.

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- Parenting types:
 - **Authoritative – sets firm healthy boundaries, open communication, and nurturing.**
 - **Connection based Authoritative – sets healthy boundaries where some boundaries are more lenient and/or removed at times, primary focus is on child's safety and respecting the child's autonomy, open discussion, and nurturing.**
 - Authoritarian – sets strict ridged rules, closed communication, and harsh/cold.
 - Permissive – lack boundaries, open communication, nurturing.
 - Neglectful – indifferent to rules or boundaries, lacks to no communication, unavailable/cold.
- Authoritative and Connection based/low demand parenting sets the family up for felt safety, connection, and trust.
- Which parenting style best fits you, your partner, and the way parenting is presented to the children?
 - If you are struggling to be the parent you desire, what will help?

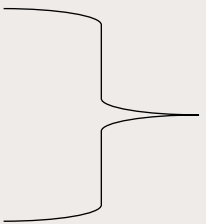
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- Types of dysfunctional family roles:
 - Primary dysfunctional family member - Narcissist, Addict, Abuser, etc.
 - Caretaker – enabler.
 - Mastermind – manipulates the family dynamics.
 - Scapegoat – is blamed for and seen as the family problem.
 - Hero – strives for perfection.
 - Mascot – the clown.
 - Lost child – invisible to rest of family and/or strives to be invisible.

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- Are there any types of dysfunctional family roles in your family?
 - Created family?
 - Family you came from?
 - Family your partner came from?
- 
- What role do you play in any or all family dynamics?
What do you feel the family needs to create more health?
What role can you play to encourage healthier family dynamics?

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- Define Conflict:
 - I am going to define it by:
 - Two or more people having different ideas (about how to celebrate the holidays) and struggling to compromise that can dysregulate one or more nervous systems.
 - If assertive communication is not used by all involved then communication can become passive, passive-aggressive, and/or aggressive.
- Define Communication styles:
 - People tend to either communicate with assertive, passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive styles.
 - Assertive = listening without interrupting, clarifying what was heard, mindful about tone of voice and body language, clearly stating needs/wants, confident in expressing what is best for yourself and/or your family, and is willing to compromise.
 - Passive = listens quietly, soft spoken, tries to please, tries to escape, closed or withdrawn body language, disregards own wants/needs, and lacks confidence.
 - Aggressive = Interrupts while others are talking, uses shame and manipulation tactics, assumes they are the only one who is right, body is puffed up, towering over others, and invades others space. Can become emotionally and physically aggressive and/or abusive.
 - Passive-aggressive = a combination of passive and aggressive, agreeing and then making sarcastic comments, holding their agreement to compromise over your head, destroying something unknowingly to the other person involved, holds grudges, uses shame and manipulation tactics.

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- When dealing with conflict:
 - Stick to the present topic and focus on the problem and not the person.
 - Do self check-ins periodically to make sure you are staying regulated.
 - Use assertive communication.
 - Use “I” statements and do the “communication dance.”
 - I feel _____ because _____, and I would like _____.
 - What I hear you saying is _____. Is that correct?
 - If 1st person says no, then ask them to repeat, and repeat this until they agree that you understand what is being said.
 - If 1st person says yes, then share your I feel and want.
 - Repeat this until conflict is resolved or agreed to disagree.
 - Know when to take a timeout and respect when someone calls for a timeout.
 - The conversation might need to pause for several minutes or days; however, revisit this topic once things are more neutral.

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- Conflict with extended family:
 - Make sure that you and your partner present a united front.
 - Remember you chose to make a family with your partner.
 - The family you came from can have different wants and needs than the needs of the family you have created.
 - Your partner needs safety and felt safety to maintain a healthy relationship.
 - If the family you came from has unhealthy or toxic traits, then be open to exploring how to create healthy boundaries.
 - Not supporting you and your partner in what you both feel is best for your created family can be an unhealthy trait.
 - There is a difference in not supporting and supporting by genuinely agreeing to disagree.
 - The child you care for needs you to provide safety and felt safety because their brain is not developed enough to do it for themselves.
 - Safety and felt safety are established when you work towards meeting your child's needs.

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- Conflict and the holidays:
 - Who do you have the most conflict with and why?
 - What do you feel will make it better?
 - What do you feel you can improve to help make it better?

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- Accommodations and the holidays:
 - Define accommodations:
 - I will define it by:
 - A tool or perspective used to adapt to a person's needs that aids in their ability to function in a way that they desire.
 - A tool or perspective used to assist in meeting a person's needs to perform in a neurotypical expected way.
 - Examples:
 - Being open to discuss natural rewards and consequences that occur depending on how we use our energy and helping the child navigate what they feel is best for them.
 - Using co-regulation
 - Engaging in sensory regulation activities before, during, and/or after the event,.
 - Swimming, swinging, spinning, water play, sand play, sensory bin play, hanging upside down, animal walks, walking outside barefoot or on textured tiles, and/or eating crunchy foods.
 - Mindfully using direct declarative language.
 - Turning on closed captioning.
 - Planning extra time to make transitions.
 - Providing a relaxing space or separate space where someone can go to take a break from engaging in social activity.

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- Accommodations and the holidays:
 - Do you use accommodations?
 - Are they helpful?
 - Why or why not?

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- Behavioral Management Strategies and the holidays:
 - Define Behavioral Management Strategy:
 - I will define it by:
 - A tool or tactic used to modify a child's/person's undesired behavior or thought process to a more desired behavior or thought process.
 - A tool or tactic used to encourage a child/person to display or use a more neurotypical coping skill.
 - Is not effective for all children: PDA, forms of demand avoidance, or trauma.
 - Examples:
 - Focusing on natural and/or given rewards and consequences to encourage desired behaviors or thought processes.
 - Using 1-2-3 Magic or a 3 count.
 - Using a 5-point scale.
 - Using a rule/behavioral contract.
 - Using a reward chart.

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- Behavioral Management Strategies and the holidays:
 - Do you use behavioral management strategies?
 - Are they helpful?
 - Why or why not?

Examples of accommodations and behavioral management strategies: Use accommodations first

- It is most important that you know your child and what they need.
- If you can, take things over ahead of time and allow kids to explore place.
- Arrive early to establish comfort, control, adapt to less crowd, etc.
- Explain in advance to others how your family will participate in the event and how you accommodate your family
- Share your kiddos hobbies and interest with people before hand.
- Use calendars
- Establish or maintain routine
- Plan in the way your child feels best and reduces anxiety. This can mean much planning and discussing ahead of time or in the moment planning.
- Encourage them to focus on one thing at a time.
- Create a social story - you can use PowerPoint with pictures & words or show pictures from previous events or events page for current event to go over what & who to expect.
- Create a schedule for the day in a way your child likes. Let them mark it cross off things complete, maybe add in flex times (where we need to use are flexible thinking to flow through an unexpected change) you can add a couple.
- Use picture card and/or share ahead of time what will come next to help kid transition.
- Create a transition song and/or activity/game with kid and trial it out ahead of time.
- Create a safe signal or word that when said or done means kid needs a break.
- Be ready to say “yes” more than “no” and shift your focus to what is “yes..”
- Make sure to focused on giving produce feedback and limiting negative feedback.
 - Keep in mind For every negative said 5 positive need to be said to help rebuild self-esteem..
- Know if you can leave your kid alone or need to stay nearby. Don’t fear being a helicopter parent if that’s what your kid needs
- Make sure kids take comfort toys/items
- Sensory input – sand play, water play, hanging upside down, swinging, weighted blanket, headphones, quiet space, chewing items, fidgets, wobble seats, sensory input steps (turtle shells), sensory brushing, crash pad, (bean bag or old couch cushion), hammock chair, etc.
- Play classical music or regulating sounds.
- Take snacks & food your kiddo will eat
- Be ready to gently redirect, gently remind options, and gently referee when needed.
- Engage with empathy, curiosity, and support to let the child know you are on their side and help them feel connected and not alone.
According ot Dr. Porges, “Kids want to do well, so if they are not something is most likely wrong.”
- If needed: use behavioral management strategies - 3 count, 5-point scale, smiley face chart, etc.
 - Focusing on assisting/helping the kid more than punishing or focusing on the consequences.. Keep it positive.

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- Making new traditions:
 - Define new traditions:
 - I will define this by:
 - The family chooses to celebrate the holiday(s) in a new or different way that strays from previous tradition(s).
 - Examples:
 - Breaking the holiday up to celebrate over the course of several days/weeks by doing multiple smaller celebrations rather than one large celebration.
 - Celebrating with multiple smaller groups of people.
 - Giving gifts or treats over the course of multiple days.
 - Celebrating with a smaller group of people who the family is close too, rather than including others who are not close to the family.
 - Treating the day like any other day.
 - Dividing up the family.

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- Attending holiday events can mean the family gets divided.
 - In a family every person has their own needs.
 - When these needs don't align is when old family traditions disappear and new traditions form.
 - There is usually a primary person/parent/caregiver. There can also be one or more support people.
 - Primary = the person who is the closest to the one who is struggling. They usually have more insight, connection, and felt safety built.
 - Support = the person who is supporting the primary person.
- Dividing up can look like:
 - One person often goes off on their own within the same location.
 - Staying in a room alone watching TV or playing a game.
 - One person often goes off on their own to another location.
 - Going to the cemetery, park, a friend's house.
 - Some people go to the holiday festivities, and some stay home.
 - You all go to the holiday festivities, but some leave early.
 - In this scenario you are often taking two vehicles wherever you go.

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- What are the ways your family becomes divided?
 - Do you feel it is helpful?
 - Do you feel it could be better?
 - If so, then how?
- What feelings do you have about the way your family spends the holidays?
 - Families who spend it divided can feel:
 - Grief: for the loss of what they imagined the holidays would be like with their kids.
 - Shame: from extended family members, friends, society, and/or internalized shame.
 - Relief: knowing everyone will engage in the holidays the way that suits them best.

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REALISTIC PLANNING TO GET YOUR FAMILY THROUGH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

- Outline for creating a realistic plan to get your family through the holiday season:
 1. Write down your concerns for the holiday season:
 - If you need, start free writing and eventually it will all come out.
 - If writing doesn't work for you, then voice record, etc.
 - If each holiday within this season creates its own unique challenges, then separate into the various holidays.
 2. Get curious about what is behind these concerns:
 - Do others share these concerns?
 - Are these concerns someone else needs to address or are these concerns you have some control in?
 - Focus mostly on what you can control.
 3. Ask yourself if your expectations are realistic or unrealistic?
 - Focus on realistic expectation.
 - Release unrealistic expectations that you are placing on yourself, others, or situations.

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- Continued: Outline for creating a realistic plan to get your family through the holiday season:
 4. I recommend choosing 1 and no more than 3 concerns to focus on at a time.
 - Choose the concern(s) that extend throughout the whole holiday season.
 - Then, if needed break down how the concern(s) effects each specific holiday.
 5. Focus on these concern(s) and what came to mind when you got curious about the cause(s).
 6. Fact check what you feel is the cause with others involved.
 - Making sure to include the person who struggles with the holiday season.
 7. Research what will be the most beneficial solutions or accommodations to assist, reduce, or eliminate the cause.
 - Making sure to ask the person who struggles to share what they feel will work best.
 - Use strategies that will not cause harm or increase stress.

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- Continued: Outline for creating a realistic plan to get your family through the holiday season:
 8. Will you use accommodations, behavioral management strategies, or a combination of both?
 - Be clear in communicating how these strategies will be used and how they will help.
 - Using clear communication that focuses on safety, felt safety, consistent expectations that can be flexible when needed, focusing on co-regulation and understanding to meet the child's/person's needs.
 9. What type of parenting style do you need to strive towards for these solutions and accommodations to work?
 - Authoritative – will use traditional behavior modification methods to encourage Cognitive and/or behavioral changes.
 - Authoritative Connection-based – will use co-regulation to encourage felt safety to reduce dysregulation or assist in establishing regulation as needed, will lower expectations to reduce anxiety, and nervous system dysregulation.
 - Do you feel confident in using this type of parenting style or do you need to build your confidence?
 - How can you build your confidence or maintain your confidence through the holiday season when using this approach?

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- Continued: Outline for creating a realistic plan to get your family through the holiday season:
 10. Make sure the solutions and accommodations that have been agreed upon are realistic for the whole family to use.
 - Assess your child to be sure they can meet your expectation using the decided upon strategy.
 - Be ready to do more of the work than your child.
 - It is your responsibility as the adult to help and teach the child(ren). It is not their responsibility to help and teach you.
 - Try these solutions and accommodations before the holiday festivities begin.
 11. Will you use these strategies alone, with a partner, with immediate family, and/or will others be involved?
 - Be clear when explaining to others what their role is and how they can help.
 - Often there is a primary and secondary caregiver/parent. There can be more.
 - Remember there is a difference between understanding and agreeing.
 - Sometimes we can assume that if someone agrees then they understand or are willing to do the work to help.
 - Sometimes someone can agree, but then not understand and/or refuse to do the necessary work to make helpful changes.

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- Continued: Outline for creating a realistic plan to get your family through the holiday season:

12. Remember this is a temporary season:

- Even if you cycle through it every holiday season.
- Each year the season is unique.
 - Give grace
 - Find glimmers
 - Focus on connection and felt safety
 - Every day you learn something new
 - It is okay to change your mind and change plans to do what is best for your family.
 - You can get through this temporary season.

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- How we plan for a holiday in our family:
 - We use an authoritative connection-based/low demand parenting style.
 - Holidays are stressful even if the stress is coming from being overly excited.
 - Any feeling that is “over” or “under” can quickly create dysregulation in our family..
 - We assess and reflect anywhere from the past three months to three weeks.
 - We examine the whole family and not just the family member(s) identified as the primary ones who struggle.
 - The only time we don’t involve someone’s voice is if we know that will add to their stress level. In our home as kids age this will most likely change to always involve their voice.
 - Is stimuli over or under?
 - Is it causing dysregulation that is needing co-regulation or is self-regulation able to sooth?
 - Most kids need co-regulation majority of the time, so you might be calculating how much co-regulation you are doing?
 - How much co-regulation is needed and how extreme is the dysregulation?
 - Is safety currently a concern?
 - Will dysfunction or conflict from others be an issue?
 - How are current accommodations and/or behavior management strategies working?
 - Do we all go, divide up, or all stay home?

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- Example of assessing using a 3-month or 3-week time frame:
 - If during the past three weeks there have been signs of high stress, then we will be more cautious.
 - If over the past three months there have been signs of high stress, but the past three weeks have showed signs of less stress, then we will be more cautious.
 - If during the past three weeks there have been intermittent signs of stress, but overall coping well, then we will be more open to participating..
 - If over the past three months there have been intermittent signs of stress, but overall coping well, then we will be more open to participating.

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- If we all go:
 - Parents might choose to go to an event that has less stimuli over a larger more stimulating event.
 - Parents mentally prep themselves and are mindful of mind/body check-ins throughout the event.
 - Parents are mindful to be ready to respond as needed/if needed.
 - Parents make sure to have any needed accommodations that travel with us.
 - Parents plan to make sure there is a calming space before attending the event.
 - Once to the event we figure out calming spaces if we don't already have one.
 - We create a calming space if needed.
 - Wonderfold Wagon, small portable tent, sheet to make a fort, etc.
 - Calming objects, toys, games, fidgets, etc.
- We all leave when anyone is ready to go.
 - However, most of the time we will drive two separate vehicles.
 - This allows for one parent to stay with child who wishes to stay and one parent to leave with child who wishes to leave.

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- If we divide-up:
 - One parent takes the child who wishes to go.
 - One parent stays home or does a special one-to-one activity with kid who wishes or needs to stay home.
 - Most of the time the parent who stays home is the one who provides this kid the most comfort.

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- If we all stay home:
 - We create our own special memories.
 - Sometimes we do our own celebration with just the four of us.
 - Hide treat filled light-up eggs in the yard.
 - Have a small Thanksgiving/Christmas/Easter dinner.
 - Let off our own fireworks or do sparklers.
 - Sometimes we act like it is just another day.

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- Build your own Holiday Plan:
 1. Write down your concerns.
 2. Get curious about what is behind these concerns?
 3. Ask yourself are your expectations realistic or not?
 4. What are your top 3 concerns?
 5. What are the causes for these 3 concerns?
 6. Fact check your thoughts with others about the causes?
 7. Research what will be the most beneficial solutions or accommodations to assist, reduce or eliminate the cause.
 8. What accommodations and/or behavioral management strategies will be used?
 9. Can you be Authoritative and/or Authoritative connection-based/low demand?
 10. Are the solutions, accommodations, and/or behavioral management strategies realist for all adults to use?
 11. Who will primary caregiver? Will there be a support person, and if so who? What is everyone's role?
 12. Remember each holiday and each holiday season might look different. Be ready to give yourself and others involved grace.

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The End

- If you need a more individual experience or have personal goals that you want to work on sign up for an individual session.
 - Contact:
 - infohiw@hiwtherapies.com
 - 317.480.8600