



Holiday and Family Gathering Survival Plan

An explainer and before / during / after plan for Diwali, Eid, Christmas, and more · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)

© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved. Free for personal use. Not for resale or redistribution.

At a glance

- Holidays can bring joy, connection, and tradition, and also stress, grief, and family tension.
- Expectations, money, travel, and old family roles tend to collide during gatherings.
- A simple plan for before, during, and after can protect your peace.

Why holidays can be so stressful

Stress researchers describe stress as what happens when demands feel greater than our resources to cope. Holidays often pile on demands at once: hosting, cooking, gifts, travel, money, and long hours with family. At the same time, our usual resources, like sleep, routine, and exercise, tend to slip.

Gatherings can also pull us back into old family roles, like the peacemaker, the responsible one, or the one who gets criticized.

Mixed feelings are normal

Holidays can bring up grief for loved ones who have died, loneliness if you're far from family or newly arrived in Canada, or sadness about relationships that are strained. Feeling both grateful and heavy at the same time is common and okay.

What the research says

Stress arises when people appraise demands as exceeding their coping resources, which explains why stacking many demands, as during holidays, increases stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Self-compassion is linked with lower stress and greater emotional resilience during difficult moments (Neff, 2003).

Tool: My Holiday Survival Plan

Before	My plan
What I want this holiday to feel like:	

Before	My plan
My realistic budget:	
What I'll say yes to, and what I'll say no to:	
Topics or people that may be stressful:	
My exit or break plan (e.g., a walk, arriving later, leaving at a set time):	

During	My plan
How I'll take short breaks:	
Phrases to change the subject (e.g., "Let's talk about something else. How's work?"):	
My support person (in person or by text):	
One thing I'll enjoy no matter what:	

After	My plan
How I'll rest and recover:	
What went well:	
What I'd change next time:	

Strategies to try

- **Lower the bar.** The holiday doesn't have to be perfect to be meaningful.
- **Protect basic routines.** Keep sleep, movement, and meals as regular as you can.
- **Plan for grief.** Light a candle, share a memory, or set a place for someone you miss.
- **Watch alcohol.** It can lower patience and raise conflict.
- **Create new traditions.** Especially if old ones no longer fit.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Play "family bingo."** Before the gathering, privately write down predictable comments ("When are you getting married?"). When one comes up, mentally mark it off. Humour can take the sting out.
- **Pre-load safe topics.** Prepare three easy conversation topics to steer toward when things get tense.
- **Rehearse the predictable comment.** Practise your calm response to the one comment you know is coming.
- **Book a recovery day.** Schedule a low-key day after the gathering to rest and reset.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

What do I love most about this holiday? What do I dread?

What role do I tend to play in my family during gatherings?

Who or what am I missing this year?

What would make this holiday feel meaningful, even if it isn't perfect?

When to reach out for support

If holidays bring intense stress, grief, loneliness, or family conflict, talking with a therapist before or after can help. Our team offers culturally responsive support in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, appraisal, and coping. Springer.

Neff, K. D. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2(3), 223–250.

Usage Notice

© 2026 Insightful Journey Inc. All rights reserved.

This resource is intended for personal growth and education purposes only. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, shared, or distributed in any form, digital or printed, without prior written consent from Insightful Journey Inc.

This material is the intellectual property of Insightful Journey Inc. and may not be modified, resold, or integrated into other programs or publications.

For permissions or clinical use inquiries, please contact: info@insightfuljourney.ca

Insightful Journey Inc. | www.insightfuljourney.ca