

Holidays - Tips for Thriving

Oct. 28th, 2018

The holidays are here again! While holidays can sometimes be a time of love and joy, others times they can feel like a marathon with the only light at the end of the tunnel being that they will eventually pass... If we're not mindful, the holiday can be a source of pressure, grief and depression that takes over our lives and makes us feel miserable.

But it doesn't have to be that way. There are many simple things we can do to not just survive the holidays but to thrive.

Experience has taught me that the first thing I need to do when approaching a challenge is to ask HP for help and that character defects that are out of control will make me and everyone around me truly miserable.

Together, my HP and I can keep my character defects in check. Many passes through The 12 Steps have taught me that these defects are really just areas in my life where I can become out of balance and that they were all born of an unfulfilled need, many from the distant past.

I've had excellent success by seeing them as characters who may or may not reflect the me I am today. It's been helpful to name them so I can recognize them and call them out when I see them. I can then apply the tips and tricks my sponsor, friends, family and HP have taught me.

I find that they are often fear based and that if I *address their needs*, they tend to relax and let go, leaving me free to be me.

The first character that comes a calling when I approach a challenge or plan something special is Polly Perfect. Born from a household where things were out of control and often unacceptable, Polly goes to extremes trying to make everything PERFECT.

I tell her lovingly but firmly that good enough is in fact good enough and that perfection is not part of the human experience. I tell her that the moments of perfection we've know always happened when we least expected them. I end by reminding her that we can only find real Joy when we relax and open ourselves to whatever "wants to happen", that the adventure of being Open Minded is far more fun than the stress of trying to orchestrate perfection.

The book, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* is an inspiration and very helpful tool for bringing this concept home.

Holidays and Birthdays can also bring out someone I call Missy Magic. Inspired by Hollywood's depictions of the magic of Christmas, Missy will go to insane lengths to try to recreate this magic in her own home. She'll spend money she doesn't have on things people don't really need. And in the end she is left feeling empty, lonely and in debt.

Missy was born from the Christmas's of my childhood, when my mother filled the house with gifts we didn't want, and often didn't even really like, while my father watched our family's

financial well being being ripped to shreds like the wasted holiday paper. The only person who got anything from our Christmas was the local Avon dealer.

When Missy comes calling, I tell her that what she needs is real connection and that we don't have to wait for the holidays to get it. We can call a friend or family member, or take a walk and connect with our HP in nature or put on some music, allowing ourselves to get lost in the beauty. Sometimes I'll just start texting people and allow the connection to unfold naturally.

For gift giving, I know that a handwritten note and a hug will bring more joy than an expensive bauble. And that time spent really being together is the one GIFT we all really need. I also make it a point to spend some time volunteering at the local food bank or community kitchen. Time spent giving to those who are truly in need fill the heart with a Joy that lasts. And it's free!

Debbie Do-it-all breaks herself cooking and baking an abundance of foods, many with little to no nutritional value. Things commonly referred to as "treats" have a sugar and fat content classify them as food abuse. They put on unwanted pounds and increase the risk for heart disease, diabetes and depression.

Debbie was born from family tradition. We have a long standing "hot pie" family joke. My grandmother used to make pie for every holiday and she would wait until late in the evening to bake it, hoping to squeeze a few extra minutes of family time into the evening. "But you can't leave yet, you haven't had your pie!" So there we were, tired and ready to go home being held hostage by pie that was still so hot, it burned the mouth. I wonder what would have happened if someone had said, "Honestly, we're tired and we want to go home. We're just going to pass on the pie this time."

My step mother would often break herself, filling the table to overflowing for that special meal.

This is one area where I'm completely over it. I cook only what people "need" to have it feel like the holidays. For my son, it's the turkey legs. My daughter-in-law needs mashed potatoes and gravy. I need the turkey and cranberry sauce, with whole berries please.

For non-holiday gatherings, I do a serve yourself, salad bar. It's easy, simple, delicious and healthy. For dessert, I enjoy Danon Triple Zero yogurt with fruit. For a special treat, I add raw cacao powder and I've got the taste of chocolate without the sugar.

Here are some thoughts on extraordinary needs that be there and some tips for dealing with them.

Grieving During the Holidays. We lost my step mother and my daughter-in-law's father right around Thanksgiving so of course the loss of those precious ones often comes to mind. When it does, we'll talk about it or we'll watch their favorite movie or do something they really enjoyed as our way of honoring their memory. If we're feeling lonely, a local retirement home or food kitchen is a great way to give to others as well as giving the gift of connection to ourselves.

It's recommended that we not give in to holiday pressures, even those that are "family traditions". We should always feel free to set boundaries and not attend or leave an event if we aren't comfortable. We can practice good self care by saying, "I'm not up for this right now."

Helping others is a great way to be helpful to ourselves. It fills the heart, gives us the connection we long for and gets us out of feeling isolated.

Suggestions include:

- Volunteering at a soup kitchen or food bank
- Going to a local retirement home
- Organizing a gift drive
- Helping your neighbor with a yard or house task

Connecting With Our HP is also a marvelous, life affirming gift we can give ourselves. Making time for the most important relationship of our lives can be something that falls by the wayside when we need it most. Even if we don't have a lot of time, a gratitude meditation or a couple minutes of Just Being can really turn things around.

Going for a walk in nature is also a great way to get centered and connected when we are feeling overwhelmed.

Notes from the Meeting Attendees:

Having watched their mother get stressed out and depressed over the holidays, the member determined they would not repeat the pattern but when they got out on their own, found that they did. In time they found that they could cut back and have seen that the longer they are in the program, the more they are able to stay true to themselves and stay in the Now.

Another member sees the holidays as a time to push forward and get caught up on cleaning etc. They see this as a time they want to contribute more to the community in a selfless way but see the holidays as a time more for spiritual connection and connection to family.

A member had great success saying "Let's not do gifts, let's get together." They found joy with creating new non-traditional traditions.

The holidays is a time they look forward to being with friends and practice setting boundaries for good self care. A good time to focus on staying connected with their Higher Power. The more I can stay connected, the more I can be of service to others.