

Creating A Better Holiday

Many people look at a holiday like Thanksgiving or Christmas as a day they hope will pass quickly. But holidays can be fun and productive just like any other day when you plan activities that are meaningful to you. Whether you look at a holiday as a long stretch of lonely hours or as a day filled with stressful activities, you can plan positive activities for yourself that will make every holiday a day to look forward to rather than dread.

Begin by writing down activities that will make your holiday meaningful.

An activity that expresses my values:

An activity that always makes me smile:

An activity that relaxes me:

An activity that connects me with people I care about:

An activity that makes me think:

An activity I enjoy but I never have time for:

An activity that brings back wonderful memories:

A spiritual activity that makes me feel connected to a higher power:

An activity that is always fun:

Other activities that are meaningful:

Now on the chart below, fill in the time slots where you have known obligations. If you find that you have too many "unpleasant" obligations, consider whether you really must do these things for this amount of time and if you can make these difficult tasks a little more pleasant.

Now schedule at least two or three meaningful activities from the previous page. Choose activities that you are sure you can do and write them in the appropriate time slots. If possible, schedule one meaningful activity at the start of the day and another at the end of the day. Make a commitment to yourself to make this holiday, and every day of your life, as personally fulfilling as possible.

7am	
8am	
9am	
10am	
11am	
Noon	
1pm	
2pm	
3pm	
4pm	
5pm	
6pm	
7pm	
8pm	
9pm	
10pm	

Anticipating Difficult Holiday Interactions

Holidays often put you in contact with people who might be difficult to get along with, leading towards a common psychological problem we'll call "holiday dread." Often, these interactions will be minimal compared to the many pleasant times of the day, but it is common for people to magnify their importance, so that just thinking about what may happen affects their mood for days or even weeks before a holiday gathering. This worksheet can help minimize the impact of dealing with difficult people at holiday events.

See if you recognize any of these behaviors and if you do, fill in the blanks with the appropriate names.*

_____ will talk about himself/herself and will show no interest in you.

_____ will be sarcastic and aggressive and will try to pick a fight.

_____ will be critical and is sure to say something negative about you.

_____ seems to hold something against you and won't even acknowledge your presence.

_____ will flirt with you inappropriately.

_____ will bring up topics of conversation that will make you uncomfortable.

_____ will be so obsessed with his/her children that you will feel ignored and unimportant.

_____ will look for some way to bully you and make you feel small.

_____ will control the conversation and will dismiss your opinions.

**Note: Keep this worksheet in a private place where people who might be offended won't see it and/or use fictitious names that only mean something to you.*

Most people find that if they are ready for these problems with some simple solutions, even the most difficult interactions are not so bad. When dealing with difficult people at a holiday gathering you can:

- Excuse yourself and walk away.
- Smile and listen while breathing calmly to relax.
- Think positive things about yourself.
- Change the subject of the conversation.
- State your feelings in a non-aggressive way.
- Interact with someone else.
- Be empathetic and think about why the person is acting this way.
- Take the high road, and remain tolerant, kind, and respectful.

Above all, be prepared. Use the next page to anticipate the difficult interactions that may occur and the positive responses you can make.

Fill in the blanks for at least three difficult interactions that you anticipate may occur. Be as specific as possible. Make sure that your planned responses are positive and will not make you or someone else feel worse. *If you feel that can improve future interactions with a friend or family member, you may want to schedule a time to work on your relationship at another time. Holidays events are rarely a good time to work out long-standing relationship problems.*

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____

If _____

Then _____