

Coping With PTSD Over the Holidays

Holidays are often times of celebration, but can be triggers for people suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). [PTSD](#) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault. Even if the traumatic event didn't occur during the holidays, the expectation of happiness can be difficult for sufferers of PTSD to muster.

People and places can spark old memories, making parties and celebrations difficult to deal with for people who have suffered loss or trauma. While most are focused on holiday cheer, people with PTSD may be thinking about what's missing or lost. There are techniques you can use to help yourself or a loved one survive the holiday season in a positive way.

Prepare Some Coping Mechanisms

You can prepare yourself by identifying your triggers and how to combat them.

Understanding yourself and what you need to do without causing a family disruption can help tremendously. You can plan ahead for situations like crowded parties with escape plans, such as a phone call from a friend after a certain amount of time, or a code word pre-planned with your spouse for when you need to leave.

Meditation, deep breathing [techniques](#), or stepping outside for a few minutes can also help if you just need a minute to reset. If you encounter extremely difficult people or situations, it's completely okay to limit your time there. Stay away from alcohol or drugs- these will only contribute to a loss of control during stressful situations.

Be patient with family and friends. They may not always hit the mark, but usually have the best intentions. A support system is so important when dealing with PTSD. Try to [talk](#) more openly with family and friends you trust about your issues. Getting those near you

on board with what you need can make PTSD symptoms easier for everyone to handle. If you trust in them and nurture their relationship with you, they can be key to recovering and getting back feelings of joy in your life.

Make Your Own Holiday Memories

Pick and choose which events you actually want or need to go to. Politely decline some invites if you know you will be too uncomfortable. If you decide to go to a party, take someone you trust and who supports you to be a shoulder to lean on if needed.

Start planning your own activities that do not involve situations that you find difficult, like an outdoors activity or trip with your family. If you live alone, connect with a local church, VFW, or other single people for safe social get-togethers. Build new traditions that won't dredge up old memories, and make new ones instead.

Avoiding the issue of PTSD with your close family and friends will not bring you closer together and will further alienate them from you. Try to [talk](#) about your feelings, what your plan is to avoid and cope with triggers, and how they can better support you. This will actually support them in this journey with you as well. When everyone is aware of what's needed, you can work on [recovery](#) together.

Treat Yourself Right

New Year's Resolutions are great, but the best thing you can do is promise yourself that you will work to keep your mind and body [healthy](#) all the time. Eating better and getting more exercise - whether it be spending some time at the gym or [dog walking](#) - will boost your mood, your energy levels, and give you a sense of achievement. When you feel better about yourself, can begin to focus on the people or endeavors important to you.

Reaching out to others in need is a great way forget about your problems for a little while. Seeking your own ways to [contribute](#) can make the holidays easier and more fulfilling. Check in with a PTSD support group to find ways to help others suffering the way that you

have, cook food or run errands for elderly neighbors, or volunteer at a homeless shelter. These are all ways for you to give joy this holiday season without feeling obligated to attend typical holiday events.

If things get difficult and you need help to make it through, plan some extra counselling sessions during the holidays to get help when needed. Look on the [PTSD](#) website for help finding a therapist, assistance for family and friends, and to find the Veterans Crisis Line and Suicide Helpline.

You can survive the holidays and PTSD by setting realistic goals, staying healthy, and being patient with yourself. Create a holiday season that's good for you, and start making new memories for a better tomorrow.