



Holiday Cheer Vs. Reality for Female Partners

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Holiday cheer is what most people look forward to every year. The bright lights, smiling faces, baking holiday treats, creating new memories with family and friends are just a few of the events that bring people joy every year. In society, traditionally, women take on many tasks during this time. In an article featured in *Ozy* magazine, titled "Thanksgiving: A Well-Intentioned War on Women", Sean Braswell describes the holidays as the "time for the ladies to don the aprons and the guys to hit the couch." From decorating the home, cooking, and baking to accommodating guests and tending to others needs outside of their own as priority. Miraculously, somehow women become Superwoman, while men enjoy the fruits of her labor and socialize with guests and family. This is not the case for female partners of sex addicts. The "season for joy" can be a season for triggers and pain. It is difficult to embrace the Superwoman role when her life does not reflect the joyous images surrounding her.

In addition to the many tasks expected of women during this time, she is also expected to be social. Daily, women are asked possible violating questions such as "When are you getting married?", "Why aren't you pregnant yet?", or "Have you gained weight (or you look skinny)?". This is intensified during the holidays as loved ones want to catch up on life events. Little do they know that you're not getting married because your partner is working through recovery, or the stress of dealing with betrayal is preventing pregnancy or leading to miscarriages, or that you are stress eating (or not eating) to cope with the betrayal. The holidays for the female partner is filled with flashbacks of past happier times that may now currently feel like lies.

What to Do?

Here are 5 tips to get through the holiday season while maintaining your sanity:

1. Make Detailed Plans

Take time to think about how to approach this holiday season. Who will be at what event? How will you handle triggers when they arise? Will your partner and you be travelling together or separately to events? Planning will decrease the chance of surprises as well as prepare you for how to handle surprises when they arise.

2. Talk To Your Partner

Express your concerns for the season. What is your partner doing to protect himself, you, and the family (children) from negative consequences of his addiction. Urge him to communicate with sponsor and participate in 12-step groups if necessary.

3. Create Solid Boundaries

Now is the time where your boundaries may be tested more than ever. Do not let them be swayed in the "spirit of the holidays." It will be more difficult to reset them when the season has passed. Stay consistent and follow through with consequences when violations occur.

4. Just Say No

Usually personal self-care is not priority for women during the holidays, but for the partner of a sex addict, this is the greatest priority. Focus on self-care so that you can be the best version of yourself at that time for your family (children) and friends. Do not be scared to delegate responsibilities to others. Have your partner be more involved with the holiday events to alleviate the pressure of going along with societal norms. Don't forget to maintain whatever you were already doing for self-care or start the process through journal writing, meditation, etc.

5. Get Support

Although the questions and comments of loved ones could be triggering, know that they may very well mean well and are concerned. Rely on trusted loved ones to help you through this time. If that is not an option, join a support group. For example, consider a Certified Partner Coach through APSATS, or a coach through POSARC or BTR. S-Anon also offers online/skype groups for those who don't have groups in their area or cannot travel to a group (www.sanon.org).

Don't lose hope! You will make it through this holiday season. It may not be filled with as much joy as you would prefer, and it will not be easy. Be nice to yourself and know that it is ok to have a "good enough" holiday.