



Surviving the Holidays

Getting through a Season that's Lost its Cheer

Dan Drake, MFT, LPCC, CCPS, CSAT-S

Remember when the holidays were a time filled with family, wonderful fragrances, and holiday cheer? In the wake of the discovery of sex addiction, we often hear how triggering special events such as holidays can be. The pictures and memories of beautiful times gone by are replaced with hurt, anger, and betrayal. This is incredibly painful, and adds to the destructive impact of sex addiction on relationships and on families. If you're a betrayed partner, you're not alone in sharing the pain of shattered memories of this holiday season. We hear from a lot of men and women who sift through the tattered remains of memories of holiday seasons. This is especially difficult when we're inundated during this season with images, commercials, and movies of lovers and families coming together, of families thriving through love. I want you to know that you're not alone in the pain you're feeling during this time. Many women and men who are the betrayed partners feel similarly.

If you're an addict or someone who has strayed from the relationship, seeing your partner triggered at this time might be confusing for you. I often hear how difficult this time can be for YOU, seeing how angry, sullen, or triggered your partner can become. It can be really painful for you to see her in pain and maybe for you to understand why she's triggered in the first place. You need to know that this is normal – it's a part of her grief process. By acting out sexually outside your relationship through whatever means you have, you've altered your partner's view not only of the present but also of the PAST. Who was the man or woman that your partner was with? If your acting out coincided with the holidays, your partner's memories of those holidays will now be tainted. Even if your acting out didn't coincide with the holidays, the relationship and the memories that your partner *thought* she had come crashing down during discovery or disclosure. So know that you can do a lot to either help her or hurt her further during this time.

I won't sugar coat things by saying that this year will be amazing for you, but I DO want to share a few ways that can help you get through this in the best possible way:

1. **If you're an addict or the betraying party, this is your chance to step up and make things better or back down and make things worse.** Are you acting dismissive or minimizing when your partner is lamenting over old photos or decorations? Do you respond defensively? If so, you've taken a step to make the holidays that much worse. Yet if you can give your partner space to grieve, to stand alongside her as she shares

BANYAN

THERAPY GROUP

REFUGE - RECOVERY - RESTORATION

the pain and hurt of your actions, if you can respond with openness, honesty, and empathy, you've made it that much more possible for a different holiday season NEXT year and the years to come. Healing after betrayal takes time and patience. You have an important role in how long the healing will take.

2. **If you're a betrayed partner, be kind to yourself.** Especially if you've had a more recent discovery or disclosure, you don't have to do everything you did last year. Give yourself a break this year. Take a year off if you want to. Have your partner step up in a new way this year with whatever family tradition you have. Eat one too many holiday treat or put your feet up this year. Taking care of yourself first and foremost will help you better take care of the family in years to come.
3. **For addicts, make sure to use all your healthy recovery supports.** It's going to be vital for you to be present and available during this time, to respond and not react. This season is probably very difficult for you. So do whatever healthy activities you need to do: Going to 12-step meetings, stepping up program calls, reaching out to healthy supports, meeting with your therapist, exercising, doing deep breathing, or other healthy coping behaviors that work for you. Your partner and your family need you this year.
4. **Turn on (or off) the TV.** If watching holiday movies is cathartic to you this year, go for it. If it's too painful to watch another commercial with a happy family sitting around a beautiful table, turn off the TV! Go do something new and different. It's ok not to feel the cheer this year. Do something new that can make you happy.
5. **Find new rituals or traditions for the holiday season this year.** It can be incredibly painful to have old rituals, memories, symbols, or experiences, tainted with the impact of sex addiction. This year you may just need to grieve the loss of the holidays in the past. You may not be ready to build new holiday rituals yet. But if you're able to this year, try to find a new ritual that feels safe. Maybe it's a new decoration that helps you start over again, maybe it's a piece of jewelry. Try cooking a new dish (or if cooking was part of the problem, order in this year!). Perhaps a vacation or a new experience can help you start a new tradition that gives new life out of the old loss. This year, try to do one new thing for yourself or if you're able to do it for your relationship.
6. **Be patient, and go slow.** This is a slow process of healing. The goal is to make each year that much better than the one before it. Do one thing new this year that brings you closer to healing yourself and/or your relationship (if it makes sense to do so).

BANYAN

THERAPY GROUP

REFUGE - RECOVERY - RESTORATION

Remember, a slow step forward is still a step in the right direction. You're not alone in what you're going through. If you need to reach out for more help or support during this time, do it! But easy does it. Be kind with yourself.

7. **The holidays will pass.** This can be a daunting season, but remember, the season will pass. Do everything you can to survive in the best possible way. It can be a painful, triggering time, but it will pass. You can get through this season!

Most of all, my heart is with you. If you're reading this, I'm so sorry that you have to experience the pain of sex addiction in your relationship. But I hold hope for you – We see women and men every day not just surviving through difficult seasons in their life but healing and growing. It may feel unattainable, but we see every day relationships that are re-forged through pain into something stronger. By walking through this pain together, you can rebuild your relationship into something more intimate than ever. I'll hold you in my heart this holiday season. May it be as good as it can possibly be, and may it be a new chance for renewal. You can do this.