



**BANYAN**  
**THERAPY GROUP**  
REFUGE - RECOVERY - RESTORATION

### **This Holiday Season**

The holidays stir up a lot of feelings for most of us: Some good, some painful. For most adults, the holidays bring a mixture of hope, anxious expectation, exhaustion, and sometimes let-down and hurt. For couples healing from the impact of sexual betrayal, the holidays can be even more overwhelming. In addition to the “normal” holiday stress comes the new normal of managing expectations, how to handle travel, visits to/from friends and family, office holiday parties, pressure around gift-giving, etc.

We’ve created the following exercise as a way for you to think through what you’d like THIS holiday season to look like for you this year. We’ll look at some specific areas that we’ve found many couples healing from sexual betrayal struggling in. But first, let’s look at this holiday season, what it means for you this year in contrast to previous years. Our hope for you and your partner is that this holiday season will bring a new level of healing in your relationship as opposed to disconnect and pain.

Please take your time in completing these exercises, be kind to yourself throughout, and if you’d like further support from a trusted guide or therapist, please do reach out to them along the way.



## This Year's New Normal

Healing from the impact of sexual betrayal is a journey of healing from grief. And few times in the year bring up grief more clearly than during the holidays. So to help you think through this holiday season and what you'd like to make it this year, let's spend a few moments exploring your expectations for this season.

First, spend a few moments reflecting on your holidays in the past (prior to "D-Day"). As you think through these memories from the past, what do you notice? Are there any themes that you can find? Any particular memories that jump out at you? Any times that seem especially significant? What feelings do you notice as you think of these times in the past? What do you notice in your body?

Spend a few minutes writing down your reflections on the holiday seasons from the past:

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Now, think through what this holiday season brings up for you. How are any of those themes from the past different this year (or post "D-Day") than they were in previous years? What are

some feelings that you have when thinking about this year's holiday season verses those in the previous years? Write down your thoughts, feelings and reactions that you have when thinking about this upcoming holiday season:

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Notice what feelings are coming up for you as you complete this exercise. For example, do you feel sad? Hurt? Angry? Scared? Anxious? Ashamed? Confused? Lonely? Disappointed? Stunned? Hopeful? Something else? Write down your feelings that you have this holiday season. We'll format these in terms of "I statements" - "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_." For example, "I feel really lonely this year because a time that had always been filled with such love and connection is now filled with secrecy and pain."

Write down several of these feelings below:

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ this year because \_\_\_\_\_

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Look at this list above. Place a number from 1 through 3 by your top feelings in order of importance to you.

Now that you've numbered these feelings, we want to make sure that your partner really hears you with those feelings. Feeling heard, even through painful emotions, can help you and your partner grieve together the losses of this holiday season. As you grieve together, you will actually begin to forge a new bond in your relationship. It is this bond that will help you make THIS holiday season a new one for you and for your relationship. Though it may involve pain, you and your coupleship can move to a new level of safety together, as you make this season whatever YOU want it to be.

Take turns sharing your feelings with each other. Note: We recommend that this exercise be completed with a couples therapist trained in helping couples heal from betrayal trauma.

A couple of really important points as you share and as you listen:

1. As the one sharing your feelings, make sure to keep this about YOUR feelings – this isn't an opportunity to blame, shame, or criticize. Though you may be expressing painful emotions, keep your comments respectful. This will help your partner really hear you.
2. For the one sharing, keep each of these feelings relatively short. We want to give you an opportunity to share and to be heard, so we don't want to overwhelm the listener with more information than he/she can hear. Allow him/her room to hear you and reflect back what they're hearing.

- 3. As the listener, your job is to listen! You may not like what your partner is saying and it may be difficult to hear. You may even disagree with some of the "facts" that are being expressed. That said, we want to give your partner an opportunity to share feelings. You are building a new foundation in your relationship this year, and that new foundation will be built on you being a safe person to your partner. The more safety you both can build, the better you will be able to turn TOWARDS each other as support rather than brace against the other as an adversary.
- 4. For the listener, pause and reflect back to your partner what you're hearing. This does NOT mean getting defensive or interpreting what your partner is saying. Rather, hear your partner and really hold her/his heart during this exercise. Again, we want to give you an opportunity to forge a new type of relationship this year. The holidays are about family, and again the more safety you can build, not only will this year go better, but so will the years to come.

After completing this exercise, please write down any thoughts, feelings, reactions that you have. Any items to follow-up with in the future? Write them down here:

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## **This Year's Traditions**

After exploring some of the feelings that you and your partner have about this year, and now that you've expressed those to each other, our hope is that you can transform this holiday season into a time of care for yourselves and for your relationship this year. It will take plenty of patience, courage, and gentleness, but we believe in the power of transformation. This will be your "act of triumph" - Moving a difficult time into a time that begins a new path of healing for you and your relationship.

With the work you did in the last exercise in mind, let's take a look at what you want this year to look like. To do this, let's first look at what traditions you want to let go of this year.

### **What needs to be taken out this year**

When you think about this year vs previous years, what traditions do you just not feel up for continuing this year?

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Are there any events that you could live without attending this year? If so, write any of those down:

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Are there certain people or places that don't feel safe this year? Write down any of these people or places that you may consider not visiting:

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Are there certain gifts or other celebrations that you'd not like this year?

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Any other person, place, thing that you'd like to consider removing for this year? Remember, the years to come may be different, we're only talking about this year. Write any more thoughts down below:

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**What would you like to keep this year**

Now that we've looked at what you'd like to take OUT this year, let's look at what you'd like to KEEP.

When you think about special holiday traditions, what would you like to KEEP this year no matter what?

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Are there any events that you really want to attend? What would you like to make sure happens this year?

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Are there certain people or places that DO feel safe this year? Write down any of these people or places that you want to make sure are part of this holiday season:

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Are there certain gifts or other celebrations that you want to make sure happen?

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Any other person, place, thing that you want to make sure to incorporate this holiday season?  
Write any more thoughts down below:

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**What needs to be modified this year**

What traditions if any need to be modified this year? This could include adding new boundaries around these events, attending for a certain amount of time, restricting certain parts or people, maintaining different levels of safety, setting boundaries around alcohol use, etc. Write down any modifications you want for this year's traditions:

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Are there any modifications you have for events this year? Write them down below:

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Are there certain people or places that you need to consider boundaries or restrictions around this year?

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Are there certain gifts or other celebrations that you'd like to modify or consider changing this year?

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Any other person, place, thing that you'd like to consider setting boundaries or modifications around this holiday season? Again, remember that the years to come may be different, we're only talking about this year. Write any more thoughts down below:

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**What would you like new this year?**

This year can also be a year of recreation. Think for a moment about what you'd like this year to look like. It may not be a perfect year, but we can certainly create some new memories and make it as beautiful a season as possible.

Are there any new traditions that you'd like to make this year? What are they?

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Are there any events that you'd like to add or to create this year?

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Are there certain people or places that you want to add to your life this holiday season, or to incorporate in a new way?

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Are there certain gifts or other celebrations that you'd like to create this year?

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Any other person, place, thing that you'd like to create for this holiday season? This is your time to reimagine what this holiday season can be for you and for your relationship.

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Now that you've thought through your new vision for this holiday season, spend some time comparing your answers with those of your partner. You may need the guidance of a therapist or counselor to talk through these items and to negotiate with this holiday season will look like for you and for your relationship.

After finishing this exercise, write down your joint plan for the holiday season – How this year will be a new year for your relationship. We wish you all the best this holiday season.

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