



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

### **Preparing for 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.



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.

If you are currently in a relationship, it can be really helpful for you and your partner to talk through your feelings about the coming holidays. This will better enable you to respond proactively to each other than reactively during a time filled with stress and let-down. If you are in a relationship and it makes sense for you to do so, complete the following exercise with your partner in a safe setting with a trusted counselor.

***If you are not in a relationship currently or if you are separated, please skip to page 6.***

## **Sharing Your Experience with Your Partner**

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.

