



Gift Giving Considerations During the Holiday Season

One of the biggest trigger-causing activities for couples recovering from sex addiction and betrayal trauma is gift-giving. Gifts have a quality of sentimentality for many people and can elicit all sorts of emotions. While the holiday season can already be emotionally loaded because of all that it represents and because of negative experiences people have had at this time, gift-giving can exacerbate the negative emotional impact of this time of year.

We've created the following exercise as a way for you to think through your gift selection, giving and receiving process. We'll look at some specific areas that we've found many couples healing from sexual betrayal struggling in. We will provide you with some prompts and exercises to spur thought and to help you gain clarity about this topic. 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.

What do gifts represent to you?

Before you begin to make your wish list for this holiday season, consider what meaning you attribute to gifts in the first place. What is the value you place on the thought that goes into the purchase of a gift for you? Think about how receiving a thoughtful gift makes you feel about your relationship with the gift giver? What does a gift symbolize to you?

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what gifts represent to you:

Now, think back to previous holiday seasons. Have you ever received a bad gift? What made it bad? Take a few minutes to reflect on your negative experiences with receiving gifts:

Notice what feelings are coming up for you as you think back to your negative experience. Write down the gift and the emotions you experienced upon receiving it. Then write down what it meant to you. The first one is completed as an example for you.

Example:

- Gift: A gift card to Target from my mother_____

Emotion: Anger and pain_____

Meaning: I am not important enough to my mother to receive a more personalized gift from her. My mother doesn't know what I like, and doesn't know me well.

Your turn:

- Gift: _____

Emotion: _____

Meaning: _____

- Gift: _____

Emotion: _____

Meaning: _____

- Gift: _____

Emotion: _____

Meaning: _____

Reflect on the list you created and notice what feeling is most difficult for you or comes up more than once. Think about how this feeling relates to the meaning you attribute to gifts. This awareness is going to help you to set boundaries and expectations around your gift-giving process this holiday season to lower the chances of you being hurt or triggered.

Boundaries Around Gift Giving

If you are healing from betrayal trauma or are in recovery from sex addiction, you will want to establish some boundaries and safety around your gift exchange process. We have compiled a list of considerations for you. You may not have had to think about these things before entering your healing and recovery process. But your needs change as you enter this process. Go through the following exercise and decide where you need to establish some boundaries or containment for your gift exchange.

For the addict:

Have you considered not buying a gift because you've been concerned about angering or disappointing your partner? Or have you considered showering them with more gifts than usual or with more expensive/lavish gifts than usual to try to make up for the hurt you've caused them? Walk through these ideas and reflect on the feelings that are behind them. Are you fearful or anxious about the holidays because of the potential to hurt your partner again? Are you having a hard time figuring out how to proceed because of your anxiety?

For the partner:

Would receiving certain types of gifts from the addict be triggering to you (i.e. lingerie, jewelry, photos)? What kinds of gifts would be most triggering? How would it be for you to not change exchange gifts at all this year? Take a minute to reflect on the types of gifts you absolutely do not wish to receive and the types of gifts that you would be open to receiving. Write them down

Triggering gifts:

Welcome gifts:

GIFT EXCHANGE PROCESS

Once you are clear on the types of gifts you are exchanging, IF you have agreed to exchange gifts, consider how you go about the actual exchange. Here are some DO'S and DON'T's

DO...

- ... discuss when and where you will be exchanging your gifts.
- ... follow the boundaries you establish around the types of gifts you exchange.
- ... start planning for this well in advance so that you can process the emotions around this long before the actual holiday.

DON'T...

- ... deliver your gift unexpectedly or unannounced to each other, especially if you are separated from your partner.
- ... have your children deliver the gifts, cards, or messages.
- ... be afraid to speak up if you don't like the gift you are given and would like to exchange it.

Feel free to consider how you want the gift exchange process to go and start developing your plan for it. Think about when you will be able to meet or be together (i.e. will you be together for the holidays or not?), who you would like to be present when you exchange your gifts (i.e. are you going to be around your entire family or do you want to exchange your gifts privately?), and what will you be giving (i.e. have you agreed on the types of gifts that will not be triggering? Have you agreed on a budget for your gift? Is gift wrap allowed?). Feel free to jot down your plan below.

ENJOY AND BE SAFE

The holidays can be difficult, but you do have the power to make them a little bit easier. Plan in advance for the things that could derail your holiday and your gift exchange process. Make sure you both feel safe with your plan and that you can rest assured that you have reduced or eliminated any unpleasant or potentially triggering surprises. From the Banyan Therapy Group to you and your family, happy holidays!