



### **Words of Encouragement for The Holiday Season**

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Support comes in many forms. So during a time filled with anxiety, stress, loneliness, and pain, I wanted to share with you the supportive words of other partners about the holiday season. These brave women come from all different backgrounds, some who are coming into their first holiday season post discover/disclosure, and others who have been on this healing journey for more than 15 years. They anonymously shared words of encouragement to you, so that you'd have support during the holidays.

I asked these questions on a survey, and below are some of the responses I received back. So if you feel like you don't have support this holiday season, just know that you're not alone. You have a community of other partners out there who are standing by your side. You can do this!

### **What was most difficult for you about the holiday season after the initial discovery / disclosure of sexual betrayal?**

Here are the issues that were most difficult about the holiday season from those who responded to the survey (ranked in order of difficulty):

1. Navigating triggers associated with the holidays
2. Handling family and friends (e.g., communication, secrets, tension, etc.)
3. Contrast between THIS holiday season and previous holiday seasons
4. Holding secrets
5. Navigating traveling with addicted partner or partner traveling on their own
6. Other, which included:
  - a. Dealing with Affair Partner contacting spouse
  - b. Tension of just being present with my spouse while holding the reality of our situation inside

- c. I knew very little after the initial discovery because I still believed my partner was truthful & I did not know that he was & had been lying to me for our entire relationship.
  - d. Our wedding anniversary was in December. My day of discovery was in mid-January. Christmas was right in the middle. So there was a whole month of pain for me.
- 7. Dealing with gift-giving
  - 8. Managing expectations around sex with addicted partner
  - 9. Handling office holiday parties

**How was the holiday season post discovery / disclosure of sexual betrayal different from holiday seasons pre-discovery?**

- Felt very sad wondering if all of my memories of holidays past were false.
- We were separated, so he didn't celebrate Christmas with us
- It was really difficult to find the energy to put as much into Christmas as I would have normally -- and I really wanted to do that for the kids' sake.
- Pre-discovery, my holiday were full of many people, lots of joy, laughter. I was big on traditions. Now, our traditions have all changed. But they are back to being wonderful again ❤️
- I had to be pleasant on the outside while dying on the inside
- My partner & I were not living together & he had to give a vague explanation of what was going on because we were in crisis & told that it was too early to share the details of what was going on with our adult daughters.
- Reality shattered and future uncertain
- We went from splitting up holiday tasks to doing them together. One of my discoveries had been that my husband was acting out whims I was shopping and wrapping presents. Doing those things together served both to reduce my worries and it built closeness.
- I went shopping for Christmas gifts and started wailing out loud in the middle of the mall. I had never done that before. I was hurting so much thinking about how my family had been blown apart. I had to flee the mall. That year, I gave money. I just couldn't bear shopping. Before discovery, Christmas was always a magical time. I decorated the house

beautifully and cooked and cooked and cooked. My children loved getting ready for the holidays. After disclosure, it was never the same.

- Have not been thru one.

**What helped you make it through the INITIAL holiday season after your discovery / disclosure of sexual betrayal? Please describe any resources, supports, relationships, or tips that helped you.**

- I talked via messaging and email with a friend who had been betrayed. I also wrote in my journal.
- Friends came over and spent time with us. We chose to limit the activities we did that year so it wasn't as stressful and busy. I prayed a lot
- We had just moved and didn't have to see any extended family... and even if we hadn't moved, I think bowing out of some of the usual commitments just makes a lot of sense.
- I took care of me. But the first year was difficult. I felt rather numb. Taking care of me was key.
- A LOT of prayer and getting alone to cry
- I have a best friend who I spoke to everyday who was & is a tremendous resource. I was still lacking much information initially.
- Therapist—individual and couples; close friends
- We did what was called pre-loading... Anticipating the triggers, and making a plan for communicating to the other we needed to get out of a particular situation and an opt out sentence to those who would wonder why we're leaving an event. We also each planned ahead for what we could do on our own if the other wasn't being supportive. For example, driving separate cars, opting out of events altogether, in non-event situations, i.e., everyday life, the usual trigger management stuff was practiced.
- A friend gave me a sampler she had counted cross-stitched with Jeremiah 29:11 on it. I hung it where I could see it all the time. I kept reading it and reminding myself that God had good plans for me to give me a future and a hope. I still have that sampler. 27 years later it still hangs where I see it every day. It took many years, but my life is very good now. I have a present and a hope.

**If you have gone through more than one holiday season post-discovery / disclosure of sexual betrayal, what helped you make it through SUBSEQUENT holiday seasons? Please describe any resources, supports, relationships, or tips that helped you.**

- Texting and calling with members of my betrayal trauma support group has been very helpful.
- Gaelyn Emerson and Sarah Morales are hosting a coaching support group that is beginning soon so that partners have a solid core of women. I was lucky to have a large group of women friends who could help hold me that first year.
- I throw myself into Christmas music... and managed to drag the kids along (we all play instruments). Music can be so regulating. Also my mother flew (to the other side of the planet) for our second disorganized Christmas. She knew everything (is an addictions counselor) and was so supportive. That was the right amount of family for those still-so-early days.
- I have made a point to make every year different. Create new traditions. Surround yourself by people that you love and who love you.
- Good friends, detachment from extended family, a good counselor
- Therapist, therapeutic support group, couples therapy, managing my anger
- Focusing more and more each year on what the seasons stood for... Leaning into Jesus and prayer. My work in values was the most healing thing... One of my values is connection and I really look forward to holidays to deepen those. So if my H and I aren't doing well, I focused on my connections with others. I also amped up my holiday traditions list.
- My anniversary is in December. I plan a special day. I might get a mani-pedi and go for lunch with a friend. For the holidays, I have friends come in and help me decorate my tree. Christmas is still sad because my children are gone and I am alone but I find friends to share it with. My season ends with day of discovery. Last year, a friend and I spent that day in a charming village and I bought myself something beautiful that symbolized a critical moment that occurred right before discovery.

**If you have gone through more than one holiday season post-discovery / disclosure of sexual betrayal how have subsequent years been different from that first year? Please describe any changes over the year(s).**

- The holidays are no longer as meaningful for me. I dread them more than looking forward to them.
- The 2nd year was so much better. We could be together for the holidays even though we were still separated.
- I really couldn't deal with the gift thing at first: my husband betrayed me while buying me a birthday gift and I didn't want any gifts from him (or to give him any). Over the years my husband has made amends in various ways including some very creative "do it myself" gifts. He never shops online now.
- Every year has gotten better and better.
- Increasingly difficult since there were staggered disclosure and many more discoveries
- Emotionally it got easier each year. The thing we battle now is complacency. Keeping up the new traditions and staying intentional when we're fatigued due to outside forces, such as work, illnesses etc.
- It's been 27 years. I still can cry over the loss AND I now reflect with deep gratitude for all the growth I have experienced. All the wonderful people I've met that I never would have known. I would never chose this experience and I now spend these holiday and disclosure anniversaries as opportunities to be grateful for the woman I have become as a result of reaching deep inside and not only bouncing back, but bouncing UP.

**What do you know now that you wished you knew earlier in healing from betrayal trauma?**

- I wish I had known that the betrayal was not about me and nothing I could have done would have prevented it.
- Love yourself 1st!
- It won't always hurt this bad. It won't always be this exhausting.
- That I'm worthy of the World.
- It is okay not to spend time with my spouses' family if I can't handle it.

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- I don't know that I wish I knew anymore than what I knew initially. It takes a great deal of time to process the enormity of the relationship betrayal which requires time & for myself being separated from my addicted spouse.
- Wish that I had a comprehensive therapeutic disclosure—which I strongly recommend to any partner....have a lie detector exam as major piece
- How to communicate my needs clearly and how to opt out of gaslighting.
- That even almost 30 years later, it still hurts sometimes. That was a surprise. I have realized this is part of being human and loving. If you really love someone, you always hold them in your heart and feel the loss when they are no longer there. I wish the resources that are available today had been available when my ex and I were going through this. Maybe my marriage would have survived. Maybe my children wouldn't have been so devastated.

### **What words of encouragement would you like to give to other partners as they enter the holiday season this year?**

- Be kind to yourself. Don't press yourself to make a perfect holiday. Consider letting go of some activities or traditions that you participated in previously.
- Life is fluid so things change. Embrace the changes as times for growth.
- The God who this season is about is always faithful, always giving, always compassionate. Letting go of the hype and focusing on his love for me (in every season) probably saved my life and sanity.
- Please take care of you, first. Self care is absolutely key - take a bath, go for a walk, lie in the grass, meditate, write in your journal. You WILL get through this!
- Be aware of your own heart and take care of it.
- Embrace other people's support, go to events if possible, & be transparent.
- This is an incredibly painful experience—relationship betrayal trauma is real and you are not alone.
- You're not alone. There are communities of women thinking of you, praying for you and who have been there.

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- Surround yourself with beauty and those who love you and accept you where you are. Grieve when you need to grieve AND keep before you a promise you are claiming for your life. Give yourself the Christmas present of creating a life you really, Really, REALLY love. Then, that a baby step towards that and watch it unfold. If you are a woman of faith, know that our God never leaves you or forsakes you, even though you may feel like you're not sure where God is in the midst of all the pain.