

How to Get Through the Holidays in One Piece, with Tips from Kaethe Weingarten

Most of us have grown up with the idea that holidays are *supposed* to be joyous occasions and yet for many people that has never been or rarely been the case. And that was before COVID-19 changed so many aspects of daily life and celebrations. The last two years have taken a toll on the mental health of about 40% of U.S. adults and almost as many children. A person feeling anxious or depressed, or struggling with other mental health concerns might be viewed by family or friends as lacking in holiday spirit, as being a bit "off." What will it be like to celebrate the holidays when so many of us may be -- let's be honest -- acting a bit crankier than usual? Well, it may be as challenging as last holiday's season. Here are some tips to assist with the holidays.

1. There is no law that says you have to be happy during the holidays. You can feel what you feel and still have holidays. You can ignore the people around you who are giving you the fisheye for not being cheerful. You are you and they are they.
2. Sometimes people use alcohol or substances to blunt their feelings during the holidays. Even over-eating can be a way to cope with holiday stress. While this may provide short-term relief, if you are anxious or depressed, it will actually make things harder once the effect wears off. If possible, find someone to share your feelings with. If you are truly isolated and there is no one to talk to in person or by phone, create an imaginary conversation or write your feelings in a journal.
3. Many of us will be mourning dear ones who died, either during the pandemic or prior to it. The holidays are often the days when we most miss loved ones. Sometimes the deceased person is whom we most associate with a holiday tradition that is now missing or not the same. Sometimes honoring the person's significance and expressing gratitude for what they provided – out loud or just in our minds – can be a way of bringing them present in a way that is comforting.
4. For some people the holidays are lonely times. Other people are getting together but we are not. For others, the holidays bring so many social demands it is overwhelming. For the former, remember that life changes. You don't know what companionship may happen in the new year. If you are over the top, get comfortable saying "no." You don't have to wait for a meltdown to set a limit either!
5. If you are getting pressure to celebrate the holidays a particular way and it isn't what you want, this is also a good time to be clear about what you do and do not intend to provide and what you can and cannot offer. It's better to let people know up-front and in advance than to have people disappointed upon arrival.
6. In families where gift giving happens, you can save yourself heartache and trouble by realistically setting a budget and sticking to it. No more needs to be said here.
7. Finally, if you are in charge of the holidays, let others help! Be as specific as possible about what you would like help with and give people plenty of notice in advance.

With these tips, my hope is that you will have a better holiday season than you thought you might. And remember, January will come!

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