



Keeping spirits bright during a pandemic holiday

Traditions, rituals in which individuals, close friends, and families repeatedly engage, are important for overall well-being. Traditions often hold special places in our hearts. They give us something to anticipate. They guide us and connect relationships, generations of family, and community. They teach us about our unique personal history. They help us develop character and a sense of belonging as they serve to pass on values, morals, customs, and culture. Traditions provide families with a sense of constancy as life changes and people grow. Traditions also provide a degree of normalcy after or during a challenging time or crisis.

A tradition is something you know you can count on. The predictability of a tradition often provides comfort in what can be an inexplicable world. Sometimes, however, traditions have to change or dissolve. In some instances, traditions change because of life's natural progression: marriage, a growing family, loss of a loved one, or a move for example. This year, the coronavirus pandemic is forcing change for many, including interfering with holiday traditions.

We may have to celebrate a little differently this year. Family gatherings may be smaller, vacations or travel may be canceled, and activities may be altered. Everyone copes differently with change. Some people might engage in negative coping mechanisms that can be harmful. Examples include avoidance, shutting down or ignoring, substance use, unnecessary spending, caffeine highs, excessive sleeping, or over or undereating.

A better way to deal with change, disappointment, stress, and loss is to engage in positive coping mechanisms. Positive coping mechanisms include healthy eating, exercise, sleep routines, taking time for relaxation, meditation, stress management, finding fun, and avoiding harmful substances such as alcohol, drugs, and nicotine.

To help you maintain the holiday spirit in times of quarantine, it can help to think outside the box and be open to new twists on holiday traditions.

- **Adjust old traditions.** Replicate the parts of the holidays you cherish, but be flexible with the present circumstance. Maybe you could have a meal similar to the one you eat every year delivered to a loved one who is homebound or in a nursing home, and then you eat together through virtual media. Even far apart, you can still say prayers, sing songs, and share stories together — virtually. You can open presents, frost cookies, even carol together.
- **Make new traditions.** This is an opportunity for new things. This is a time for growth not regret and loss.
- **Do not forget the old traditions.** Even though time and circumstance may change a tradition, you can still cherish the memory and talk about it.

- **Maintain meaningful connections.** When troubled or stressed, it is important to maintain emotionally supportive relationships. Think about people in your life who need your support as well.
- **Spread joy.** While your traditions or traditional way of doing things are on hold, you can get in the spirit by spreading joy, giving thanks, and connecting to those in need in your community. Look for volunteer and charity opportunities, make a meaningful holiday greeting and send a thoughtful message overseas to service men and women or to an older adult in a nursing home who has no family. You may even consider making volunteering a new tradition.
- **Change your mindset.** Think about why the tradition had to change. You may not be able to control why it had to change, but you can control your reaction to the change. Adopt a positive mindset, and use this as an opportunity to take charge.
- **Lower your expectations.** This might be a good year to make things special without being extravagant. Make homemade gifts a theme or consider gifts of time or experience. Plan and allow for flexibility.
- **Find fun.** Be open-minded and willing to adapt. Find ways to laugh and relax. Host a napkin-folding contest, make healthy holiday-themed treats, enjoy a family talent show, take a morning walk with family, choose a community service project, or deliver meals to people who cannot visit family.

Adapting or establishing new holiday traditions can create positive memories for you and your family. In this pandemic year, it will add to your story and make you and your family stronger.

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