

# SUSTAINING SOBRIETY *Thriving Through the Holidays*

Recovery is about staying connected. This is true anytime, but especially during the fall and winter holidays with their many triggers that can challenge it. These include increased pressure to meet expectations, financial distress related to gift spending, and loneliness around loved ones no longer present to celebrate them.

Avoiding substance use during the holidays when many events and celebrations can be particularly hard for those new in recovery. It can help to consider in advance how one wants to spend their time, budget, and expectations to enjoy the season and remain sober.

Some points to consider include which events one wants to attend and what triggers might be present; what gatherings might come with toxic encounters and how those can be defused; and what memories and hopes the holidays open.

It is important to remember you and your recovery are the most important present on any holiday list. It is why saying “no” to an invitation is not only OK, but right. Replying “no” supports you in avoiding relapse. Ways to politely decline include saying you appreciate being invited, but won’t be able to attend and adding (or not) you have a few other prior commitments.

If you do accept an invite to a gathering, consider going with a person who will support your sobriety and help you leave when you want. This is called having an escape exit and enables you to be aware of any triggers - whether drugs or individuals pressuring you to do something you don’t want to do – present and avoid the consequences. This planning in advance allows those in recovery to protect themselves and enjoy the holidays.

The holiday, however, can provide for individuals in recovery an opportunity for making new memories. A time for celebrating with friends made in recovery, feeling grateful for where they are in recovery and the relationships that they are building rather than self-isolating, and understanding more than ever the importance of staying connected to the clinicians, coaches/mentors, and programs that provide hope and help prevent relapse.

One’s recovery team is the best defense against isolation and best offense in keeping holiday expectations realistic, stress in check, and sobriety supported. Happy, healthy holidays from all of us at MiraVista Behavioral Health Center.



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