



## RECOVERY THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

BY: RECOVERY ADVOCATE

The holidays bring up a mix of emotions for me, even years into my eating disorder recovery and sobriety. This time of year, reminds me of all the struggles I've faced in recovery—family dynamics, guilt, and grief. But recovery has also taught me that there's no “perfect” way to get through the holidays. It has given me the ability to find new moments of joy, connection, and community. Over time, I've come to understand that navigating this season is a practice—one that involves learning what's triggering, what's challenging, and what helps support me through it.

### VALIDATING MY EMOTIONS

I used to dread the anxiety and guilt that would bubble up during the holidays. I'd wonder if something was wrong with me because I wanted to feel holiday cheer, but I simply didn't. Instead, I worried about food, family, setting boundaries, and not slipping back into my eating disorder.

It was a game-changer to realize that what I was feeling wasn't abnormal. My emotions were an appropriate response to the stress of the season. This understanding helped me let go of unrealistic expectations and allowed me to experience the holidays for what they were, without the added pressure to feel different. Validating my emotions—without judgment—opened the door to moments of joy and peace I didn't think were possible.

### NAVIGATING FAMILY DYNAMICS

Family has always been a big trigger for me during the holidays, and in some ways, it still is. Not everyone in my family is supportive or understanding of my recovery or my identity. Being around people who don't feel safe can be incredibly hard. What's helped me most is leaning on my recovery community and giving myself permission to take space from my family when needed. Sometimes that means spending the holidays entirely with chosen family; other times, it means limiting the time I spend with my family. Either way, it's okay to prioritize your recovery and mental well-being.

If you do have supportive family members, planning ahead can make a big difference. Having honest conversations with them about what is and isn't helpful in navigating triggers can create a more supportive environment. And if spending less time with family feels like too big of a step, staying connected to others in recovery can be a lifeline. I've found it so grounding to text or call a recovery friend during family gatherings when I need a moment of support.

### FINDING NEW MOMENTS OF JOY

Recovery has shown me that while the holidays may never look like a picture-perfect card, they can still hold moments of connection and joy. It's okay to grieve what feels hard about this season and to celebrate the ways you've grown. This time of year, doesn't have to be about perfection; it can be about honoring your needs, finding what feels good, and creating your own traditions. You're allowed to rewrite what the holidays mean for you.

