

Protect your Mental Health During the Holidays

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For much of America, Thanksgiving is the holiday when families come together for a reunion full of joy and thankfulness. For others, however, it's a hard decision to make whether to attend or make an excuse.

Not everyone's mental health issues stem from family situations or conflict within their family, but enough do that cases of mental health relapse tend to spike sharply in late November and December. The pressure to show up and interact with certain people can be very intense, but complying may lead to even more stress. How can you decide what to do this Thanksgiving?

Evaluate

How is your mental health right now? If you are already on shaky ground, participating in a tense family dinner may not be the best option at this time. It's understandable if you need to opt out. On the other hand, if you are feeling good and want to try to connect, deciding to make the trip isn't a bad idea either.

Plan Ahead

If you choose not to go visit your family, consider filling that weekend with other options to keep you occupied and avoid any feelings of guilt. Maybe book a quiet weekend away by yourself or with a trusted friend and relax. Unplug and turn off your phone, and stay away from social media. If you do decide to go and visit, set hard limits for yourself and know exactly when you need to call it quits in case things start to go badly.

Practice Self Care

Your mental health may not be understood by family members and friends, and this can be hurtful. If your mental health is used as a topic of conversation in a rude and insensitive way, you have the right to ask that the comments stop - or if necessary to remove yourself from the situation. Don't guilt trip yourself over leaving early; instead, figure out how to rescue yourself from a mental health spiral and focus on yourself.

Make Your Own Traditions

If Thanksgiving represented something special in your family but is now not an option for you, think about something that is meaningful and create a tradition that works for you. Perhaps you can volunteer

at a soup kitchen that weekend or visit an old folks home to spend some time with those who have no family of their own. This can give you a sense of purpose and thanksgiving, and form a new tradition that you can enjoy for many years to come.