

Making This Holiday Season Meaningful



This coming holiday season will be like no other we have experienced in our lifetime. We at Pathways College would like to provide some tips and suggestions that will help you have a joyous and safe holiday season with friends and family.

First of all, it's important to remember why spending time with family and friends is important. As humans, we all have the need for meaningful personal connection. I know my limited social interactions these days have left me wanting more. Spending time with family and/or friends (people with whom we have a shared history) gives us time and space to bond, talk openly, share what is going on in our lives, show affection, and create or continue traditions. Having a shared history means that our family and/or friends have seen us in both good and bad times. They know us and love us even though we are not perfect. This fact is actually very freeing. It allows us to open up and share deeply without the threat of rejection and it allows us to show affection in return. Having a shared history often means we already have some traditions in place. My family has many. This year, I imagine many of our normal traditions may have to change, but I am willing to accept that in order to keep each other and the community at large safe and healthy. Maybe there is an opportunity to add some new traditions.

If you are like me, at this point, you might be thinking about those in your family who don't see things in the same way you do. I have a few in my family. In difficult conversations with them, I always remind myself that I love them, even though we disagree. I have control over how I react. I like to remember that when I am disturbed it is about me and not about them. I listen for understanding as I might learn something from hearing someone else's ideas, and I can make the decision not to argue. In fact, I tend not give my viewpoint unless genuinely asked. I find that my family members are often set in their ways of thinking, and may resist if presented with other points of view. So why argue? I choose to love them and let it go. Once they have expressed their views, I can often find another topic of conversation where we have similar views, or ask questions about what else has been going on in their lives. If we remind ourselves of the fact that the goal of family gatherings is to connect in meaningful ways, it makes it easier to let everyone

have their own opinions where there are disagreements, and suggest moving on to topics that build connection.

Meaningful connections can be difficult if there is a need to make amends. I love the word “amends” because it has the word mend in it. That is how I think of forgiveness. It mends relationships. Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself.

- Is there someone I need to forgive? I might want to think about this before a family gathering. It takes work and time to forgive someone.
- Is there someone I have wronged? If so, what can I do to apologize and start mending that relationship? It is impossible to make someone forgive, but it is possible to show understanding of the wrong that has been done, ask for forgiveness, take action to right the situation, and ask if there is anything else can be done to mend the relationship.

For planning events and get togethers, it's important to think about the ways you enjoy spending time with your family and friends.

- Do you like to be creative together by doing arts and crafts, cooking, or putting up decorations?
- Do you like to be active together by exercising, going on vacation, exploring new places, volunteering, or shopping?
- Do you enjoy reading books together, completing puzzles, playing board games, or watching a movie or show together?
- What are some ways you have been able to connect so far during the pandemic?
- What are the activities you enjoy and look forward to?

Thinking through what you enjoy will help you prioritize what activities to plan. Due to the current circumstances, we won't be able to celebrate the holidays as usual. We will need to be creative in the ways we spend time together. I may have to Facetime with my daughter who lives in Canada when we decorate our tree. I hope my mom and I can make cookies at the same time while talking on speakerphone. Whatever ideas I come up with, I plan on making the most of the time I can spend with my family and friends.

Now that you've thought about what is important to you, and what you look forward to this season, it is helpful to recognize that that your family and friends may want to celebrate in other ways. Make sure you express what you would like to do and what you are comfortable doing and/or not doing. It is easier to do this before people start making plans, so be proactive, and start now. Also, you get to decide which events you are attending, but it is polite to make that known ahead of time too. Make sure you are planning and attending in-person activities that fall within the CDC recommendations for COVID-19: meet outdoors, limit the number of people, limit the amount of time (1hr), stay 6 feet apart, wear masks, wash your hand and use hand sanitizer.

Even with careful planning, once a family gathering has started, holidays can be stressful and emotions can run high. Always remember the goal of gathering is to make meaningful connections. It is perfectly acceptable to take a break from a situation. For me, drinking a large glass of water and then going for a walk by myself helps me clear my head and helps bring my emotions down. Drinking water has been scientifically proven to help calm emotions. There are other less isolating options too. If you enjoy kids or animals and there are some around, play with them. If you enjoy physical activity, grab a family member and toss a football back and

forth. Taking a break can help put you in a better frame of mind to make those meaningful connections.

We at Pathways College hope that however you decide to spend this holiday season, you are able to stay safe and healthy, are able to make meaningful connections, and deepen your relationships with your loved ones.

Happy Holidays,

Beth Price and the Pathways College Team

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