

A Holiday Guide to Difficult Family Dynamics

You've likely heard the refrain: "there's no place like home for the holidays." And while the tune may be familiar, the sentiment isn't always shared by those who are more concerned about managing conflict thanks to complicated family dynamics. If *Home Alone* would be your preferred situation for the holiday season, read on for tips to help you keep your mental health at the top of your wish list.

The Gift of Boundaries

Healthy boundaries (<https://www.arcora.ca/resource/create-healthy-boundaries-to-boost-your-mental-health/>) are a gift that keeps on giving. Communicating what you need and just as importantly what you don't—arguing about politics at family dinner, anyone?—will be a huge help in managing conflict during the holidays and beyond. Setting boundaries means understanding your limits and providing clear expectations for others. This will also make it easier to recognize when you need to distance yourself from situations that are detrimental to your well-being.

That being said, try not to default to an all-or-nothing approach—maybe you ask to be seated further away from that family member instead of skipping the get-together entirely. Be sure to keep in mind that others have their boundaries too and ultimately it's about finding a balance that works for everyone.

When Seasonal Gatherings Snowball

While togetherness may be the reason for the season, it can easily become too much. If you find your social calendar overwhelming—especially due to events that you feel obligated rather than excited to attend—recall those boundaries from earlier and work on prioritizing.

This might mean opting to send along season's greetings instead of attending an event you're dreading or setting a time limit on parties for the sake of your social battery. Above all else, allow time with your loved ones to take precedence, whether that includes family in the traditional sense or the people who've become family to you. We know it can be tough during busy times, but be sure you also allow yourself space to recharge and [focus on self-care \(https://cmha.ca/news/self-care-simplified-why-its-essential-and-how-to-make-it-happen/\)](https://cmha.ca/news/self-care-simplified-why-its-essential-and-how-to-make-it-happen/). After all, that's when it's most important.

Be Merry—or Don't

There's lots of pressure to embrace the spirit of the holidays with expectations of endless joy and even a little magic. This standard of cheerfulness above all else is unrealistic since our problems (relationship or otherwise) don't just disappear at a certain time of year. Not to mention this intensity inevitably creates disappointment when things don't go exactly as planned. There's nothing wrong with feeling less than festive so never let others try to convince you that you need to [celebrate or act a](#)

certain way (<https://cmha.ca/news/make-sure-to-take-some-time-for-yourself-this-holiday-season/>).

It's okay if the holidays are difficult, but there's more you can do for yourself than just survive them. Remember to lean on your healthy boundaries, your loved ones and, if you need it, professional support.