

# FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

## Enjoying a Happy and Sober Holiday Season

Stressful. Weird. Dangerous. Unusual adjectives to describe what traditionally is known as the most festive of seasons. But to millions of people in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs, holiday stress can trigger relapse. Many more Americans face the anxiety of dealing with intoxicated loved ones during holiday get-togethers or with the uncertainty of how to act around someone in treatment and recovery.

“For so many, the holidays are not a joyous time of the year, but a season filled with loneliness, anxiety, self-doubt and unachievable expectations that can result in serious consequences if not managed early,” says Joseph Lee, M.D., a child and adolescent psychiatrist and addiction specialist with Hazelden, who is available for media interviews this holiday season. “The holidays can stir up old issues and emotions when spending time with family and friends.”

As part of its national outreach campaign, “Four Generations Overcoming Addiction,” the internationally renowned nonprofit addiction treatment center Hazelden advises that cross-generational family gatherings are an opportune time to support those in recovery and loved ones struggling with addiction issues.

### HOLIDAY TIPS FOR ALL FAMILIES

- **Model Desired Behavior at Holiday Parties.** In a survey released in October 2009, Hazelden found that 90 percent of teens view their parents as role models on issues of using alcohol or other drugs. Holiday family gatherings are an ideal venue in which parents and grandparents can demonstrate the responsible use of alcohol to younger generations.
- **Share Your Stories.** Personal stories can be enormously powerful in changing lives. In the same 2009 survey, Hazelden found that nearly two-thirds of teens said hearing their parents’ stories about past alcohol or drug use would make them more responsible about their own substance use. Holiday get-togethers are a great time to share stories from one generation to the next.
- **Set Boundaries.** If there is known alcohol or other drug use among family members, set firm boundaries around family celebrations. Let family members know ahead of time that substance abuse will not be tolerated during your festivities.

### HOLIDAY TIPS FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF A PERSON IN RECOVERY

- **Have a Heart-to-Heart.** To avoid any awkwardness, have a direct conversation with the family member or friend in recovery before the holiday celebration. Tell them you are proud of them and ask if there is anything you can do to make them feel more comfortable at the party.
- **Prepare as a Family.** Understand that families cannot cure addiction and they cannot control it. Nor can families cause a relapse during the holidays – it’s up to the recovering person to be responsible for their own recovery. But families can be supportive of loved ones in recovery – especially during the holidays.
- **Show your Support.** “Twenty years ago this Christmas (at age 30), I experienced my first sober holiday since I was 16,” recalls William C. Moyers, Hazelden vice president of foundation relations. “I distinctly remember feeling out of place and everyone else was walking on eggshells around me. No one talked about how comfortable or uncomfortable I was, or that I was in treatment and in recovery.” Approach a friend or family member who is in addiction treatment the same way you’d approach them if they were battling any other chronic illness. Don’t ignore it, but don’t base the whole experience of your holiday around that person’s situation. Say to the person, “We’re really glad you’re here and that you’re sober.” It is okay to talk about the change in family dynamics. Acknowledge his or her recovery in a low-key way.

- **Offer Alternatives.** There should be holiday activities that aren't completely focused on alcohol. Provide alternative drinks and watch out for certain foods. Even though dishes made with wine, beer or hard liquor have no traceable alcohol content, just the flavor of the alcohol could trigger a relapse for someone in recovery.

## **HOLIDAY TIPS FOR THOSE IN RECOVERY**

- **Good Self-Care is Vital.** Because the holidays present unique stressors that are not necessarily prevalent during other times of the year, it is critical to take some quiet time each day and work on an attitude of gratitude. Fit relaxation and meditation into your day, even for a few minutes, no matter how busy you are.
- **Enhance Your Support System.** Holidays are a good time to reach out more frequently to your therapist, sponsor, spiritual advisor or support group. Spend time with fellow people in recovery. Let others help you realize your personal limits. Learn to say "no" in a way that is comfortable for you.
- **Find New Ways to Celebrate.** Create new symbols and rituals that will help redefine a joyful holiday season. You might host a holiday gathering for recovering friends and/or attend celebrations of your Twelve Step group. Avoid isolation and spend time with people you like who are not substance users. Don't expose yourself to unnecessary temptations such as gatherings where alcohol is the center of entertainment.
- **Focus on Your Recovery Program.** During the holidays, ask yourself, "What am I working on in my program now?" Discuss this with your sponsor.
- **Release your Resentments.** Resentment has been described as allowing a person you dislike to live in your head, rent-free. Resentments that gain steam during the holidays can be disastrous for anyone, especially recovering people.
- **Bring a Buddy.** If you are going to a party where alcohol will be present, bring someone with you who is in recovery or who is safe and who will support you. Have a way out – drive yourself so you have a way to immediately leave the party and go someplace safe. Plan ahead: say, "I can only stay for an hour."
- **"Bookends" are Important.** Talk with your support system before you go to a holiday party and then have a plan to connect with your support system after the event.
- **Get in Touch with Spirituality.** Holidays may also be a time to evaluate your spirituality and find a personal way to draw support from the spirit of the season. Return the holidays to a spiritual base, and stress the power of unselfish giving.

For more information about supporting loved ones who are addicted or in recovery, visit [www.fourgenerations.org](http://www.fourgenerations.org).

**MEDIA NOTE:** Hazelden experts available for interviews regarding addiction and recovery issues during the holidays include: chief medical officer Dr. Marv Seppala, vice president of foundation relations William C. Moyers, and psychiatrist Dr. Joseph Lee of Hazelden's Center for Youth and Families. If you would like to arrange an interview, contact Christine Anderson, at 651- 213-4231 or [canderson@hazelden.org](mailto:canderson@hazelden.org).

Check for more information, content updates and inspiring new stories of addiction and recovery at [www.fourgenerations.org](http://www.fourgenerations.org)