

How to Talk to Your Family About Holiday Plans During COVID-19

Source: [Sun Life](#)

Holiday planning in the time of COVID-19 can be a challenge. But these tips can help "the conversation" go smoothly.

With the second wave of COVID-19 underway, it's tough to know exactly how the upcoming holiday will look like. But one thing's for certain: your winter holiday celebrations are likely to feel a little different than last year's.

Of course, COVID-19 doesn't have to stop your family from having a fun and fulfilling holiday, but balancing holiday festivities with social distancing can be stressful. That's especially true if you and your loved ones have different ideas about how to spend the season.

So what can you do to please everyone during the holidays? Try these tips to make fun and safe family plans that won't make anyone feel left out.

1. Have the holiday conversation early

"Much of the anxiety and stress you feel about the upcoming holiday stems from uncertainty," says Anne Klein, a personal coach and counsellor at Evolve Chiropractic & Wellness Centre in Calgary. "Having a frank conversation – sooner rather than later – can set everyone's nerves at ease and manage expectations."

A family conversation is especially important for kids, as children are more likely to look inward or blame themselves for fears and uncertainties. Having an age-appropriate discussion and reassurances that they can still enjoy the holidays can fight fears before they start.

Bring up the idea of a conversation in a low-pressure setting, like a group email chain or your family group text. Then you can schedule the talk at a time that works for everyone.

Keep in mind, it's best to have the actual conversation over a video call. The ability to hear tone of voice and see body language minimizes miscommunications, which could otherwise add to unnecessary conflict.

2. Speak and listen to your family with empathy

When it comes to the tough holiday conversation, it's important to be empathetic.

"When everyone has an opportunity to express their needs, hopes and concerns, you can start negotiating for what you want while also meeting their needs," Klein advises. Here are three key steps to keep in mind as you have the talk:

- Communicate your needs, wants, and concerns. Articulating your concerns, particularly for family members at high risk, gives your loved ones a chance to understand your perspective.

- Listen to and validate your loved ones' concerns before offering solutions. Validation is especially important if you disagree about how to spend the holidays. Taking the time to truly understand where they're coming from can make everyone less defensive and ready to compromise.
- Then, work together to create alternative plans that are acceptable to everyone.

3. Be inclusive with your family plans

Pay particular attention to close relatives, like grandparents, who are used to visiting over the holidays.

While an in-person visit may not be possible for them, they might feel more included with a special video call during your holiday festivities.

4. Consider socially-distanced alternatives for the holidays

Your traditional holiday parties may be out of the cards this year. Still, there are ways to spend time with your loved ones while keeping the kind of distance and precautions you require.

Winter hikes, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or sledding all make for outdoor family fun that allows for social distancing. And, there's always virtual options such as:

- Family Zoom calls to chat over hot cocoa;
- FaceTime while you trim the tree; or
- Watching holiday movies together using streaming features, like Netflix Party.

You might also use this time to focus on personalized gifts for the friends and family you can't see in-person.

If you're crafty, you can make budget-friendly, homemade presents like hand-painted ornaments or soup or baking mixes. Then add a homespun touch to your gift packaging with decorative stencils or stamps, or homemade holiday cards.

5. Suggest delaying important family events

Ultimately, the holidays are really about creating shared memories. For example, having your "Christmas" in July might still feel special simply because you're together.

It might seem odd to delay a traditional holiday, but remember that these changes are temporary. The pandemic will eventually end, and the adjustments you'll need to make this year won't last forever.

Meanwhile, working together to minimize the effect of a second wave ultimately shortens the amount of time we'll have to spend in quarantine. So sacrificing some holiday traditions this year makes it more likely you can celebrate how you'd like in 2021.

6. Give yourself a break if you need it

If you come across family conflict during your talk, try to focus on a cheerier common ground, like all the festivities you'll enjoy together next year.

But if the conversation feels particularly draining, try to give yourselves a break and re-group when you're all feeling a little better.

The holidays can be a stressful time – even without a pandemic. So remember to take time for self-care and seek out support if you need it.