

WHO ALL OVER THERE?!

A Holiday Survival Mini-Guide

What do you think of when you think of the holiday season? For some, November & December are filled with great times & fond memories. These are the days that some have been awaiting all year. Time spent with loved ones... the familiar sights, sounds, and smells... the warm spirit of the season... All of it can bring a sense of wonder and joy.

For others, though, this season can be stressful. These are the days that some have been dreading all year. Right behind the fond memories sneaks the realization that the ones you made them with are no longer here. Seeing happy families in matching Old Navy PJs on your timeline evokes deep longing for a life as yet unmaterialized. And, sure, the cheer may be there for others because you are the one making it so... at the price of your time, talent, and COINS! But what about your peace on earth (and in these 2 months)?

I created this mini-guide with you in mind. You who have mixed emotions during this time. You who are overwhelmed or disillusioned. You who just ain't feeling it. This mini-guide isn't meant to cover everything, but I hope it helps you think about the basics of navigating holiday stress and find your own ways of coping.

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ALL ABOUT ACCEPTANCE

Let's just jump right into it and talk about grief & loss. The O'Jays once sang, "Christmas just ain't Christmas without the one you love." And, folks, I'mma tell you... Eddie LeVert ain't never lied. No matter where your grief may be throughout the year, there is something about the holidays that tends to make that sting a little more palpable. Yet, despite the very common experience of increased grief around this season, there may be some of you who do not want to face it. So you avoid it in whatever way you can – working, cooking, shopping, partying, drinking, worrying about everybody else, isolating, filming hours of TikToks, **WHATEVER WAY YOU CAN**. Until it catches up with you... like it always does.

Have you considered trying something new this year? Have you considered accepting your grief rather than avoiding it? What do you think that might look like for you? **First let's start with a word of validation.** Read this out loud:



"My feelings are valid. My thoughts are valid. It is only through acknowledging and accepting them that I can begin to address them."

Indeed, your feelings of sadness or grief are valid, beloved. They are the normal response to a loss. Though death is the common type of loss that most think about, there are others. Relationship loss or estrangement, changes in financial status or stability, health changes that detrimentally impact your functioning, and other types of loss may also prompt holiday-related grief. Even "thwarted expectations" (i.e., things that you hoped to happen but did not) can prompt sadness or grief around this time. An example of thwarted expectations may include having a partner and/or children of your own to share the holidays with. Grief can also come in the form of longing. Some may wish they had a "normal" or "close" family to share these days with like everyone else seems to have. Instead, they come from a dysfunctional family, and the holidays always seem to involve some sort of drama. **Whatever the feelings are, be real with yourself about them.**

Acceptance is important because **you'll need that basis of acceptance to then decide how you'd like to proceed** in action. If you like to journal this writing prompt may help you.



Is there a loss, longing, or thwarted expectation that I am grieving this holiday? How have I tried to avoid facing that in the past? Has avoiding worked to "solve" the grief? If not, what am I prepared to do differently?

BOOSTING YOUR BOUNDARIES

We started with acceptance to get you in tune with your thoughts, feelings, and reality, because you'll need that for this next section. **The holidays can be such a demanding time** and we can be pulled in so many different directions – if we allow it. Your co-worker is asking you to cover for them at work on a day you've already called off. Your kid's Christmas list is 5 million items long & money is tight this year. You promised yourself you'd stick to your healthy eating plan, but bae made a banana pudding cheesecake. Your family wants you to come around Granny's house, but knows you're trying to avoid a certain person and refuse to tell you "Who all over there?!"

Without a keen sense of your priorities and acceptance of your triggers and limits, you run the risk of self-inflicted overwhelm. Now is as good of a time as any to sit down with yourself and determine what you want your holiday-related boundaries to be. Use the checklist below to help you consider which boundaries might be helpful in reducing your level of stress this season. **Remember, boundaries are rules of engagement FOR YOU, not others.** You can't tell nobody else what to do. Thus, you'll notice that the list below is centered on your behaviors. This is not an exhaustive list; add some of your own if needed!

- I will take ___ days off to rest and enjoy my holiday. Specific days I will take off are: _____.
- I am not assisting with cooking this year.
- I want to help with cooking, but not be over-burdened. So, I agree to cook: _____.
- I cannot gift everyone this year. These are the people I will gift: _____.
- My gift-giving budget this year is: _____.
- I will keep my prior commitment to my health by: _____.
- I will maintain my commitment to sobriety by avoiding _____ use.
- I already know I cannot be around _____ and preserve my emotional health. I will ask about their projected presence & decline invitations should I be informed of their intent to present. Should I not be previously informed, I know to care for myself by leaving promptly yet gracefully.
- I would like to spend time with _____, but already know I need to limit that time to _____. It is my duty to myself to stick to that limit. I can consider amending the limit if necessary.

CONSCIOUS COMMITMENTS

After reviewing the boundaries section above, you may be wondering how you'll stay on track, especially in the face of peer pressure (or, quite frankly, in the face of your own struggles to keep your word to yourself). **You will stay committed by being conscious of your values.** If your actions are Santa's reindeer, your values are Rudolph – guiding your actions toward the end goal. I thought we said earlier that the end goal was less holiday stress, yes? Well, let's fire up that red nose and start identifying your values then!



Look back at the boundaries you identified on the previous page. What values fuel those boundaries?

For example, the budget boundary may rest on the value of financial responsibility. The value related to avoiding someone whom you know is psychologically unhealthy may rest on a value of self-preservation. The "no cooking" boundary may rest on a value of... well, rest. When it seems easier to fold, remind yourself of your value and your desire to live a life according to those values.

You can also do things the other way around by **first identifying which values are important to you, then being very intentional about choosing to engage in holiday activities more aligned** with those values.



Google "personal values assessment" to find free online tests that will give you an idea of your values and their priorities.

For example, if you discovered that one of your higher endorsed values is creativity, you can choose to set aside time to make a holiday wreath. If altruism, you can volunteer. **Center yourself on your values and then let your commitments match.**

Finally, **allow yourself to have different values than others, even those in close relationship to you.** Likewise, **allow them to have different values than you and see their actions as a reflection of those values,** not as targeted toward you. For example, though it can be annoying, try to look at those sometimes awkward & intrusive questions about when you're settling down, getting married, having kids, yada-yada-yada as more about the asker and their values than you and yours. It's a projection, a reflection of their own expectations of themselves. Allow yourself to be free their expectations and be confident in knowing that your values matter to you, and that's that on that.

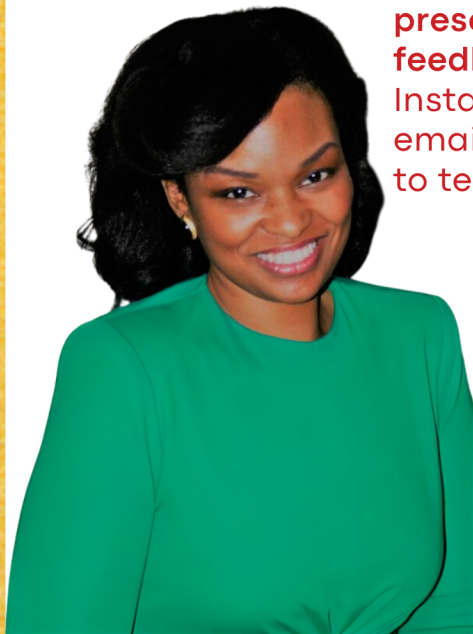


WELP... THAT'S A WRAP!

I hope you enjoyed it!

I truly hope you enjoyed engaging with this holiday survival mini-guide. The concepts are applicable past this season, so keep it as a reference if helpful in the new year to come. While this guide is not intended as a replacement for counseling or therapy, I imagine some of you might use this guide in your solo journaling or meditation time. Others may use it as a supplement to work you're already doing in counseling or therapy. I just hope it's helpful however you use it.

If you wanted to give me a little holiday present, I would love to hear your feedback! Message me on Facebook or Instagram @level3wellness or shoot me an email at dr.andrews@level3wellness.com to tell me how liked it or how you used it.



Keep in mind to not share sensitive health information for patient privacy reasons. Also, tis the season for giving, so if this mini-guide was helpful to you, please share with others!

**Be Well,
Dr. Andrews**