

Facing the Holidays as a Sexual Abuse Survivor

The holiday season can intensify anxiety, shame, and sensory overload for survivors of sexual abuse. Social gatherings and family expectations may activate trauma responses even when no immediate danger is present. This is not weakness—it is your nervous system responding to stress.

Common Holiday Triggers

- Feeling judged or dismissed for your emotions
- Shame related to past experiences
- Sensory overload (noise, crowds, smells, lighting)
- Alcohol-fueled conflict or political arguments
- Feeling trapped or unable to leave when needed

Ways to Care for Yourself

Plan ahead: Decide how long you will stay at gatherings. Set a clear arrival and departure time.

Set boundaries: Limit the number of events you attend. Fewer gatherings often support better regulation.

Protect your nervous system: Take breaks in a quiet room, step outside, or bring headphones or a book.

Mind alcohol: Limit intake or choose non-alcoholic drinks.

Ground yourself: Use the 5 Senses exercise—name something you can touch, see, hear, feel in your body, and see again.

Remember: You are not required to perform the holidays. Choosing calm, boundaries, and realism is an act of self-respect. Your needs matter.

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