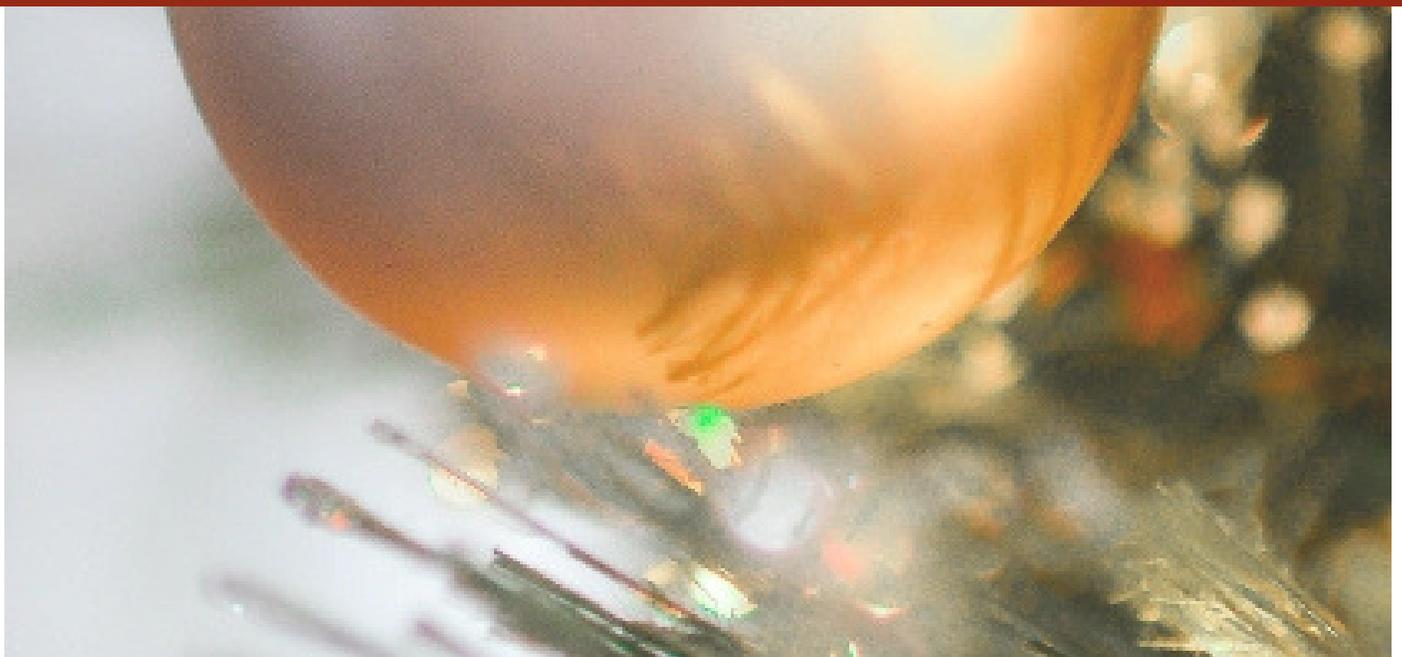




HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS



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Handling the Holidays

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Introduction



The holidays are here and for many of us, they aren't filled with joyful anticipation and heartwarming memories. Instead, there's a sense of dread and anxious thoughts that we can't seem to quiet. There are painful memories, dysfunctional family members, drama, and walking on eggshells trying to keep the peace.

The holidays don't have to be this way! You don't have to suffer through them silently. And you can stop trying to change or fix the dysfunctional people that wreak havoc with your life. You can change yourself – and you may be surprised by how big a difference it makes when you can create a plan for coping with challenging people, recognize your triggers, change negative thinking patterns, speak up for yourself, set realistic expectations, and take care of yourself.

Before we dive into learning practicing these skills, let's take a few minutes to set some intentions and goals for this holiday season, so you'll be clear on what you want to accomplish.

What in particular do you want to be different this holiday season?

Are you willing to take a look at your own behavior and accept responsibility for how you contribute to holiday stress and family conflict or dysfunction?

Are you ready to start doing things for yourself and owning your self-worth?

If you could change one thing about the holidays in order to make them happier or more manageable, what would it be?

How much time and effort are you willing to put into creating happier holidays?

If you're ready and willing to make some changes, let's get started!

Module 1

Recognizing the Triggers & False Beliefs that Keep You Stuck



What makes the holidays stressful?

The holidays can be stressful for all kinds of reasons. And we all have our own holiday triggers – the things that make us feel especially overwhelmed, sad, angry, scared and stressed. To begin, try to identify the situations and people that make your holidays stressful.

Below is a list of circumstances or situations that feel stressful for many of us. You can add to the list if you think of additional sources of stress.

Use a scale of 0-10 to rate how stressful these aspects of the holidays are for you.

Situation	Level of stress
Loneliness, grief, missing loved ones	
Dealing with difficult or toxic people	
Too much to do, too little time	
Pressure to do things perfectly or create the perfect holiday	
Financial issues, pressure to buy	
Crowds, traffic	
Long work hours, overtime, work-related commitments	
Family commitments or traditions that you're expected to continue	
Travel	
Memories of past holidays that were sad or difficult	
Others expecting you to be someone you're not	

Seasonal Affective Disorder, lack of sunlight contributing to depressed mood, irritability, low energy	
Not having the time or energy to do things for yourself, the holidays are about making other people happy	
Someone else's alcohol or drug use	

Is there something about the holidays that you dread?

Who really gets under your skin?

Triggers are a re-activation of difficulties we've faced in the past – something that reminds us (consciously or unconsciously) of a feeling or experience that was overwhelming or upsetting for us.

What triggers feelings of anger, resentment, frustration, shame, guilt, or sadness this time of year? Are you aware of what past experience it's reminding you of?

Monitoring your stress level

How do you know when you're stressed out?

Effectively managing stress requires being proactive and noticing signs of stress early. When we're highly stressed, the signs are obvious. It's the subtler, beginning signs of stress that can go unnoticed – and these will build up over time and become problematic. So, now I want you to tune into both your physical and mental signs of stress, so you can catch them early.

To begin, familiarize yourself with these common symptoms of stress. And we're all different, so feel free to add additional symptoms to the list

- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Backaches or other aches and pains
- Stiff muscles
- Fatigue
- Rapid heartbeat or difficulty breathing
- Upset stomach, diarrhea, or other intestinal troubles
- Feeling like there's a pit in your stomach
- Feeling of dread
- Negative thoughts about yourself or others
- Swearing more than normal
- Frequently getting sick
- Craving carbs or comfort foods
- Loss of appetite
- Increased use of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, or other substances
- Apathy
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Ruminating or worrying
- _____
- _____
- _____

Stress, like most things, is easier to manage when it's small. I like to track things using a simple 0-10 scale. When your stress level reaches a high level (8, 9, 10) it's challenging to reduce it because your emotions are so strong, and your body is so tense. At these levels, you're far more likely to lose your temper, become physically aggressive, abuse substances, or isolate yourself. You'll find it's much easier to use healthy stress management techniques such as meditation, mental grounding, eating healthfully, or journaling when your stress level is under a seven. This is why it's key to notice the early signs of stress and take steps to lower your stress before it becomes overwhelming or debilitating.

To stay on top of your stress level, try recording your symptoms for the next week using the worksheet that follows. Hopefully, this will increase your awareness of your stress level and help you to reduce it before it reaches the upper limit.

Date	Symptoms	Overall Stress Level (0-10)

What are your most common early signs of stress?

Challenging distorted thoughts and false beliefs

Now that you've identified the situations and people that trigger holiday-related stress, we're going to look at how your distorted thoughts and false beliefs may be keeping you stuck.

After years of dealing with difficult situations and people, it's not uncommon to feel hopeless; no matter what you've tried, nothing seems to change. If you feel frustrated and stuck, that's understandable. Sometimes we also fall into self-pity or feeling like a victim because we feel powerless to change the people and situations that cause us distress.

However, even though these feelings are normal, they aren't helpful or accurate. Victims don't believe change is possible. They feel defeated, hopeless, and powerless. And when you feel victimized and powerless, it's hard to see all of your options and what you **can** do. So, you need to move away from a victim mentality that's based on distorted thoughts (aka cognitive distortions*) and pessimistic thinking so that you can move toward solutions. I want you to feel empowered to take control of your feelings and your life. To begin, let's work on identifying how your victim mentality is keeping you stuck.

Identifying your false beliefs

Write down your strongest beliefs about your holiday challenges.

Example: My father always ruins Christmas with his drinking.

I can't cope with another argument this year.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Often, negative beliefs are built on all-or-nothing thinking. Notice whether the statements you wrote on the previous page include words such as:

- Always
- Everyone
- Forever
- Never
- Nothing
- No one
- Can't

You want to try to avoid thinking in such extremes and begin to see the shades of gray – that things aren't so easily sorted into good or bad, success or failure, healthy or unhealthy.

You may not be able to change other people's behavior or everything about a situation, but you can change your own thoughts and actions. I want you to take an active role in changing what you can and identifying what you can do about each of the seemingly hopeless situations that you wrote down on the previous page.

Talk back to your false beliefs

Try rewriting each of your beliefs so they state what you can do (not what you wish other people would do) and get rid of the absolutes and all-or-nothing thinking.

Example: My father will probably continue drinking, but whether it ruins my Christmas is up to me. I'm not going to let him have that kind of power.

*I **can** cope with family arguments. I don't have to sit there passively. I have choices and ways to take care of myself even if others choose to fight.*

1.

2.

3.

4.

How does it feel to focus on what you can do rather than on other people's behavior?

At this point, you may not know exactly what you're going to do differently, but I hope these exercises are helping you recognize that you have choices and you're capable of changing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You don't have to change other people in order to reclaim your holiday joy. You've got the power to do it all on your own!

*For more information about cognitive distortions and how to change them, I encourage you to read these two blog posts:

[13 Common Cognitive Distortions](https://livewellwithsharonmartin.com/common-cognitive-distortions) (https://livewellwithsharonmartin.com/common-cognitive-distortions)

[How to Challenge Cognitive Distortions](https://livewellwithsharonmartin.com/how-to-challenge-cognitive-distortions) (https://livewellwithsharonmartin.com/how-to-challenge-cognitive-distortions)

Module 2

Healthy Communication & Handling Conflicts



Changing your reactions

You can't change what other people do and say, but you can change how you respond to them. And in order to get control of and change your reactions, you first need to understand them.

Overreacting

An overreaction is a big reaction, one that seems to be too strong given the situation.

Overreacting includes losing your temper, yelling, throwing things, slamming the door, becoming defensive, storming off, giving a cold shoulder or “death stare” in response to a minor disappointment, criticism, or slight. When you overreact, your friends and family may be confused by your behavior; they may be scared, hurt, or angry. In short, overreacting can damage relationships and impede communication and conflict resolution.

Often, we overreact when old memories and feelings have been triggered by what's happening in the present. So, you're not just reacting to what's going on right now, but also to something that happened in the past. The present triggered feelings of shame, anger, abandonment, fear, or hurt, and that's why you're responding so strongly. When you understand the entirety of what you're reacting to, you can have greater compassion for yourself and respond appropriately.

You may have learned to overreact by watching your parents or family behave this way. Big reactions may have been the only way to get noticed in your family. Or you may react strongly as an adult because you weren't allowed to have feelings or outbursts as a child.

How do you overreact?

Are there particular people, situation, or feelings that trigger you to overreact?

Underreacting

Underreacting is not as obvious because it's not observable; it's a lack of response when something actually warrants one. When we underreact, we push our feelings down and internalize them rather than express them.

When you underreact, you're denying that you have feelings about something. For example, if your father makes a derogatory comment about your spouse for the second time, you might feel angry, ashamed, or hurt. Pretending it doesn't bother you is an underreaction, whereas going on a five-minute tirade and storming out of the restaurant is probably an overreaction (and definitely not a helpful response).

Underreacting is also something you probably learned in childhood. Many of us grew up in families where we weren't allowed to have feelings – and we certainly weren't allowed to express them. In order to cope with our feelings, we had to bury them. We had to pretend things didn't bother us; we had to walk on eggshells to keep others from losing their tempers. And many of us turned to alcohol, drugs, food, shopping, the internet, and other compulsive behaviors to numb our feelings.

If you grew up in a dysfunctional, chaotic, unpredictable home, you were probably confused by your feelings and didn't have anyone to help you understand that feelings are normal and there are healthy ways to express them, ask for what you need, and tell people how you want to be treated.

Most of us actually bounce back and forth between overreacting and underreacting. When you deny your feelings and “stuff” them down, they don't disappear. Suppressed emotions build up over time, often without us realizing it, and then we explode with anger that seems disproportionate for the situation. We then feel embarrassed or ashamed of our behavior and revert back to suppressing and underreacting. It becomes a vicious cycle of hurt, miscommunication, and never having our needs met.

How do you underreact?

How do you try to numb your feelings?

Do you switch back and forth between overreacting and underreacting?

What are some positive ways to release your feelings? (Think of ways to release them physically, emotionally, and verbally.)

As you can see, neither overreacting nor underreacting work very well. Overreacting results in hurt feelings, ruptured relationships, and others not being able to understand our feelings or needs. Underreacting also makes it hard for others to understand us because we're not effectively communicating. And bottling up our feelings leads to stress, unhealthy habits, and contributes to physical and mental health problems. Instead of overreacting and underreacting, we need to practice healthy communication skills that will help us resolve conflicts and improve our relationships.

Next, we'll explore the four key components of healthy communication and handling conflicts:

1. Anticipating challenges
2. Tuning into your feelings
3. Being assertive
4. Picking your battles

Anticipate challenges

Knowing your triggers and planning ahead for challenging situations is your first line of defense. Anticipating difficult people and situations allows you to take care of yourself before, during, and after a challenging encounter.

Here's an example of how anticipating a challenge can help you manage your reactions and handle your stress effectively.

Johanna feels anxious about spending Christmas at her in-laws. She spends sleepless nights worrying about what will happen and how she will react. Every year her brother-in-law, George, has too much to drink and gets loud, obnoxious, and belligerent as the night goes on. Recognizing and accepting that this is a stressful situation helped Johanna plan ways to cope. Instead of packing last minute shopping and baking into Christmas Eve, she now spends the day going for a run with her best friend and getting a massage. During the Christmas gathering, she enlists the support of her mother-in-law and they've agreed to step into another room to vent to each other whenever things get tense with George. Johanna also plans to use deep breathing exercises and a coping mantra to manage her anxiety so that she doesn't overreact. And, Johanna recognizes that after the stress of Christmas at her in-laws, she needs to treat her self with compassion. She takes the day off from work, sleeps in late, drinks lots of water and eats healthfully, and relaxes with a good book.

Johanna's approach doesn't change her brother-in-law's behavior. He still gets drunk and acts inappropriately. However, now Johanna goes into Christmas with less stress, has an ally and strategies to help her through the challenges that occur on Christmas day, and she takes time to care for her physical and emotional health after this stressful event. These strategies not only help Johanna avoid overreacting or underreacting, but they help her accept what's out of her control and focus on what she can do to make Christmas less stressful for herself.

What challenging people or situations do you anticipate this holiday season?

How can anticipating challenges help you take steps to decrease your stress and focus on what you can control?

Tune into your feelings

One of the main reasons that we over or underreact is because we aren't aware of our feelings. When we aren't tuned into our feelings, and how they manifest in our physical bodies, they can sneak up on us and this is why we're often shocked by the intensity of our own reactions; we didn't notice that our feelings were piling up.

Noticing your feelings just takes practice. If you weren't taught how to notice, name, and validate your feelings as a child, these are skills you can learn now.

First, we need a vocabulary for talking about feelings. Below is an abbreviated list of feelings; there are many more. As you read through the list, think about what distinguishes one feeling from another. For example, what's the difference between feeling angry and feeling frustrated?

Feelings

- Angry
- Annoyed
- Frustrated
- Irritated
- Horrified
- Ashamed
- Depressed
- Sad
- Disappointed
- Discouraged
- Lost
- Alone
- Insecure
- Embarrassed
- Nervous
- Worried
- Afraid
- Sick
- Jealous
- Offended
- Blamed
- Shocked
- Surprised
- Content
- Happy
- Joyful
- Confident
- Excited
- Hopeful
- Grateful
- Excited
- Tired

It's also helpful to note the intensity of your feelings. Again, a 10-point scale works well for this.

If this is difficult for you, pay attention to how your physical body feels and see if it can help you identify your feelings. Our emotions often show up as physical sensations. For example, anger might manifest as balled up fists and a clenched jaw. Worry might manifest as a headache. Excitement and joy might manifest as increased energy.

We can meet some of our needs ourselves (such as a need for rest). Other needs are relational, and we need to communicate our needs to others, so they can help us meet them.

It's important to learn how to assertively ask for what you need. You can't assume that others know what you need. We have to tell them – and we have to do it in a way that increases the likelihood that they will hear us. Of course, communicating our needs doesn't guarantee that others will meet them, but the odds increase when we directly and kindly ask for what we need.

Assertive communication is direct, non-blaming, and respectful. "I statements" are a common form of assertive communication. They follow a simple formula.

I feel frustrated when you make plans with your family without consulting me. I'd like for you to talk to me before committing to plans that involve me.

Practice using this format to communicate your needs by filling in a few examples below.

I feel _____ when you _____. And I would like (or I need) _____.

I feel _____ when you _____. And I would like (or I need) _____.

Think about how "I statements" might be helpful in communicating what you need during the holidays. You can also try using them to head off potential problems. Below is an example of how that might sound.

Mom, last year I felt hurt and annoyed when you criticized how I disciplined Susie and Johnny. This year, I'd like to avoid that from happening and I'd really appreciate it if you would pull me aside and talk to me about your concerns in private.

Here's how to make a different request in the same situation:

Mom, last year I felt hurt and annoyed when you criticized how I disciplined Susie and Johnny. This year, I'd like to avoid that from happening and I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't say anything negative or critical about my parenting. I know you mean well, but it really hurts my feelings.

As I said before, being assertive doesn't guarantee that people will do what you ask. However, it's still important for you to stand up for yourself and let people know when they've hurt or disrespected you.

Pick your battles

Sometimes it's hard to know when to set a boundary and be assertive and when you should just let something slide. Certainly, not everything that displeases you needs to be addressed; we need to "pick our battles".

But the question remains: How do you know when to be assertive and when to let it go? Use the reflective questions below to help you figure out what feels right to you. Spending some time on this will also help you avoid overreacting and underreacting.

- Does this person repeatedly say or do hurtful things or is this a one-time occurrence?
- What's the difference between someone or something being annoying or irritating and someone being abusive or personally attacking me? Which is happening now?
- Is the intensity of my feelings inline with what is happening in the present?
- Is this experience/person triggering painful feelings or memories from my past?
- Will this matter a week from now? A month from now? A year from now?

The key is to differentiate behavior that irritates or rubs us the wrong way from treatment that's truly hurtful.

How will you decide when to let something go and when to address it?

Module 3

Setting Realistic Expectations



Why expectations matter

An expectation is a belief or idea about how someone or something *should* be. Having unrealistic expectations often leads to disappointment, frustration, and resentment – because life doesn't always go the way we want it to. People will inevitably let us down and make mistakes. And we get upset with ourselves because we don't meet our own expectations; we don't behave the way we want to, reach our goals or accomplish what we set out to do.

If you're frequently disappointed, frustrated, hurt, or angry, it's probably (at least in part) due to having expectations that don't match your reality.

Holiday expectations

It's especially easy to fall prey to idealized expectations during the holidays. We get so many messages from television, social media, magazines, and so on, that present a picture-perfect holiday or family gathering. This is not the reality for most of us – and yet we continue to measure ourselves against this unattainable standard. When we do this, we feel ashamed and like there's something wrong with us.

Being able to set realistic expectations can significantly improve your mood and ability to handle the holidays. To begin, let's take a look at your expectations and determine if they're realistic.

Become aware of your expectations

The first step in setting realistic expectations is to become aware of what you're thinking – what you're expecting from yourself and others. It's helpful to spend some time exploring your overall expectations at the start of the holiday season. And then, I also encourage you to check-

in with yourself periodically throughout November and December, especially before any holiday events, gathering, or parties.

What do you expect from yourself this holiday season? What do you think you should do or accomplish?

What do you expect from others? How do you expect them to behave? Try answering these questions regarding various people in your life.

Your significant other?

Your children?

Your parents?

Your siblings?

Your in-laws?

Your friends?

Your coworkers?

Give your expectations a reality check

Now that you're aware of your expectations, you can check to see how realistic they are. A general guideline is that if your expectations are met less than half of the time, they are probably not realistic.

How often do you meet the expectations you identified?

How often do your friends, family, and colleagues meet your expectations? (You can also go back and write a percentage next to each of the expectations you identified on the previous page.)

Which of your expectations are the most out of alignment with reality?

It's helpful to remember that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. This means that people (yourself included) are creatures of habit and will most likely behave as they have in the past.

Unless you have specific reasons to believe your relatives or friends have changed, don't set yourself up for anger and sadness by expecting something outside of the norm. People can change, but it's a mistake to expect that your family dynamics have changed without any evidence; that is just a wish. For example, if your parents get into a heated argument every Thanksgiving, you should expect the same behavior this year unless you have concrete knowledge that something has changed (such as they went to marriage counseling).

Are you expecting people or circumstances to be different this year?

What evidence do you have that someone or something has changed that warrants changing your expectations?

On the contrary, sometimes we don't adjust our expectations when we should. You need to adjust your holiday expectations when you know something significant has changed -- a new baby joined the family, a loved one died, someone moved away, got married or divorced, lost their job, was diagnosed with an illness, got sober, etc. When a big change has happened in your family, it will change not only the way the affected individuals behave but also the way family members interact with each other.

Do you need to change your expectations because something has changed in your family?

Set realistic expectations

So far, in this module, you've identified your expectations, given them a reality check and determined how likely they are to be met. Now, you're ready to make adjustments, if needed.

As I mentioned earlier, if your expectations are routinely unmet, they are probably unrealistic. You might wish that people would do what you want or even think they should be living up to your expectations. But if they aren't, you are the one who has to change. And you must begin by changing your expectations.

Which of your holiday expectations are unrealistic? (Remember to include expectations for yourself as well as others.)

Given the reality of the situation and the people involved, what are more realistic expectations?

Realistic expectations help you cope with the holidays

When you have realistic expectations, you avoid hurt and angry feelings. They also help you to focus on what you can do to make things better and create a plan for coping with challenges. The following questions can help you create a plan.

Given the reality of this challenging holiday situation, what are your options?

How can you make this situation more manageable for yourself?

What can you do if it becomes unmanageable?

When you have realistic expectations, you're no longer wasting energy on trying to change other people. You can put your time and energy into taking care of your own needs and making changes that will help you cope. And when you can create these plans in advance, you'll feel prepared and confident heading into the holidays.

Module 4

Taking Care of Yourself



In addition to recognizing triggers and false beliefs, assertively communicating our needs, and managing our expectations, we need to take extra good care of ourselves when we're going through a stressful time, like the holidays. In this module, you're going to focus on four ways to care for yourself: setting boundaries, knowing your worth, self-care, and self-compassion.

Boundaries

Boundaries are a necessity in every relationship. Boundaries create a healthy separation between you and others. This includes your right to and desire for personal space and privacy (physical boundaries) and to have your own feelings and thoughts (emotional boundaries). Boundaries also show people how you want to be treated. For example, when you tell someone that they are standing too close to you or that their controlling behavior is not okay, you're showing them where the line is between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Boundaries are good for everyone because they make your expectations clear, so others know what to expect from you and how you want to be treated. And when we set boundaries, we're less angry and resentful because we are communicating our needs and desire to be treated with respect.

Ideally, people will respect our boundaries when we communicate them clearly. But we all know that some people will do everything they can to resist our efforts to set boundaries; they will argue, blame, ignore, manipulate, threaten, or physically hurt us. And while we can't prevent people from acting like this, we can learn to set clear boundaries and take care of ourselves.

How to set boundaries

There are three parts to setting boundaries.

1. Identify your boundaries.

It's important to be clear about what you need before trying to communicate or enforce your boundaries.

What specific boundaries do you need to set during the holidays?

What do you think might prevent you from setting boundaries?

Why are these particular boundaries important? How will they improve your life and/or relationships?

2. Communicate your boundaries and expectations clearly, calmly, and consistently.

Stick to the facts without overexplaining, blaming, or becoming defensive. For example, it's more effective to say "I'm calling an Uber. I don't want to get in the car with you when you've been drinking," than to lose your temper and say "I can't believe you're going to drive home after you've been drinking all night! Every time we go out, it's the same thing. I'm not going to take it anymore!"

The "I statements" that we practiced in Module 2, also work well for communicating your boundaries.

In addition, you need to be mindful about when you communicate your boundaries. If possible, choose a time when you have the other person's undivided attention (not when they're engrossed in watching the big football game, for example), and when they're sober and calm. Of course, this won't always be possible as some boundaries need to be set as challenging situations unfold. However, the exercises in this book will help you know what you want and need ahead of time and you can use that knowledge to set boundaries and let others know what you will and won't tolerate before it happens.

Try writing down and rehearsing the specific words you want to use to get your message across clearly, calmly, and without attacking others.

3. If your boundaries aren't respected, evaluate your options and take action.

When people don't respect your boundaries, you still have choices. They may not be your ideal choices, but you can take stock of them and choose the best option. For example, if your sister continues to belittle you after you've told her that it's hurtful and you want her to stop, you don't have to tolerate her behavior. Instead, you could leave the situation, turn off your phone so she can't harass you by text, or skip your mother's holiday gathering because your sister will be there.

With the specific boundaries you intend to set this holiday season in mind, consider what you'll do if your boundaries aren't respected.

What are your options? Brainstorm as many as possible.

Which feel like the best options for you?

How can you remind yourself that boundaries are a necessary form of self-care and it's important to set them even if others don't like them?

Knowing your worth

If you're not used to setting boundaries, it can be an intimidating undertaking. Was it difficult to figure out what boundaries you need? If so, it can help to think about them in terms of the basic rights we all share. When someone violates one of your basic human rights, you need a boundary to protect yourself.

On the next page, you'll find an example of a personal bill of rights. A personal bill of rights is a standard for how you will treat others and how you expect others to treat you. As you read through the personal bill of rights, see what feelings come up.

Personal Bill of Rights*

1. I have the right to ask for what I want.
2. I have the right to say no to request or demands I cannot or choose not to meet.
3. I have the right to say no without feeling guilty or needing to explain my reasons.
4. I have the right to express all of my feelings, positive or negative.
5. I have the right to change my mind.
6. I have the right to make mistakes and not have to be perfect.
7. I have the right to ask for help.
8. I have the right to follow my own values and standards.
9. I have the right to do things others don't approve of.
10. I have the right to say no to anything if it's unsafe or it violates my values.
11. I have the right to determine my own priorities.
12. I have the right not to take responsibility for others' behaviors, actions, feelings, or problems.
13. I have the right to expect honesty from others.
14. I have the right to be angry at someone I love.
15. I have the right to be uniquely myself.
16. I have the right to feel scared and say, "I'm afraid."
17. I have the right to say, "I don't know."
18. I have the right not to give excuses or reasons for my behavior.
19. I have the right to make decisions based on my feelings.
20. I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time.
21. I have the right to be playful and frivolous.
22. I have the right to be healthier than those around me.
23. I have the right to be in a non-abusive environment.
24. I have the right to make friends and be comfortable around people.
25. I have the right to change and grow.
26. I have the right to have my needs and wants respected by others.
27. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
28. I have the right to be happy.

Do you think all of these rights apply to you? Why or why not?

Which of these rights do you have the hardest time accepting?

If you struggle with your self-worth or have been mistreated, it may be hard to believe that you have the right to be treated with respect and dignity; you have the right to say “no” and to express yourself. These rights don’t have to be earned and they aren’t reserved for good or smart or perfect people. Just as the Bill of Rights of the United States applies to all Americans, this personal bill of rights applies to all people. Everyone is worthy of love, respect, and being healthy. You don’t have to earn these rights.

Having a personal bill of rights can be empowering! However, there are also responsibilities that come along with it. You are responsible for treating others as you’d like to be treated, and for setting boundaries, speaking up for yourself, and defending your rights (in a respectful way, of course).

*Adapted from the Author Unknown, Personal Bill of Rights:
http://www.dharmaspirit.com/pdf/Personal%20Bill%20of%20Rights_Handout.pdf

Self-Care

When you're going through a stressful time, such as the holiday season, you need to increase your self-care. Self-care isn't a luxury – it's a necessity! When you take care of yourself, you're more likely to stay healthy, happy, and be able to do the things you want during the holiday season, whether that's volunteering or singing in a choir or decorating your house. And if you neglect yourself, you may compromise your immune system, get irritable, and feel exhausted.

Self-care needs to be personalized to match your needs, interests, and personality. Below are a few ideas to help stimulate some ideas.

Examples of holiday self-care:

- Getting enough sleep, physical activity, and eating healthfully
- Taking your medication and keeping your doctor appointments
- Staying home if you're sick instead of pushing yourself to go to work or school
- Not taking on any new commitments or projects
- Seeing a therapist
- Praying
- Meditating
- Going to a religious service
- Spending time alone
- Listening to music you enjoy
- Spending time around positive people
- Enjoying a holiday tradition (not an obligation), like decorating or baking, that's meaningful to you
- Declining an invitation or going home early because you're tired
- Spending time in nature

What helps you stay healthy physically, emotionally, and mentally?

Do you have time set aside to do these things?

Self-care tends to get neglected during the holidays because we're busy and our normal routines get disrupted. In order to make sure self-care doesn't end up on the bottom of your to-do list (or not on it at all), you need to do some planning.

The questions below can help you work around some common holiday challenges.

Will you be traveling or having house guests during the holidays?

Will you have additional childcare responsibilities because your children or grandchildren are on school break?

Will you be taking time off from work?

Do you have extra responsibilities or tasks during the holiday season that deplete your energy and time for self-care?

Do seasonal changes in the weather impact your normal self-care activities (such as exercising outside)?

Will you be going to parties and events where you're tempted to overindulge in alcohol and holiday treats?

How can you adjust your schedule and prioritize self-care?

Take a few minutes right now to look at your calendar and commit yourself, in writing, to some self-care activities this week. And remember, self-care sometimes means removing things that aren't restorative from your calendar.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is a form of emotional self-care. It's being kind to yourself when you're struggling. Everyone has struggles – sometimes more and sometimes less -- and everyone deserves compassion during difficult times.

Hopefully, the holidays have some joyful, fun parts. But, as you know, they can also be a struggle due to financial stress, having too much to do, dealing with difficult family members, or coping with depression or grief.

The first step in practicing more self-compassion is recognizing that you're struggling. I think many of us are quick to dismiss our struggles as “normal” or “not that bad”. And sometimes we're just not in touch with our feelings, perhaps pushing them away because they're uncomfortable or overwhelming, so we don't notice how much we're suffering.

What's something that you're struggling with right now? It doesn't have to be something “big”. Everyday struggles, like spilling your entire cup of coffee or getting a speeding ticket, need compassion, too.

Most people are excellent at giving compassion to others which means you already have the skills to be self-compassionate; you probably just need to practice it.

Self-compassion is giving yourself the same kindness, grace, and acceptance that you'd give to a dear friend when she's struggling. One way to do this is to say something compassionate to yourself regarding your struggle. You might start with one of these phrases:

- I understand
- This has been really hard
- I care about you
- What would help you feel better?
- You deserve love (or kindness or forgiveness or rest, etc.)

Try writing a compassionate statement to say to yourself.

In addition to using affirming verbal statements such as these, you can do loving things for yourself. A loving action could be:

- Giving yourself a neck rub
- Treating yourself to dinner out or a fancy cup of coffee
- Calling in sick to work
- Scheduling self-care
- Taking a break
- Listening to a guided meditation
- Exercising
- Soaking in a hot bath
- Writing yourself a note of support and encouragement

What can you do for yourself that would feel loving?

Self-care and self-compassion will support your efforts to stay calm and confident in the face of holiday challenges. If you notice that you're in (or will be in) a high-stress situation or experiencing a difficult emotion (like anger, fear, or sadness), ask yourself: How can I take care of myself during this difficult time? What can I do to give myself comfort?

And focusing on self-care and self-compassion is empowering because they are completely in your control; you can take care of yourself regardless of what drama or chaos is going on around you. And when you take care of your physical and emotional wellbeing, you're saying to yourself and others, "I matter".

Module 5

Conclusions and Reflections



This workbook has given you the basic skills you'll need to handle the holidays this year. In Module 1, you learned to identify your holiday triggers, monitor your stress level, and recognize and change pessimistic thinking. In Module 2, we explored how overreacting and underreacting impede communication and we practiced assertive communication skills. And in the third module, you adjusted your expectations for the holidays, so they more accurately reflect reality. And, finally, in Module 4, we focused on prioritizing self-care and self-compassion.

Learning new skills and behaviors takes a lot of work and practice. So, you probably won't master all of them in the next month or two, but with continued practice, you will!

Which of the exercises in this book have been the most helpful?

What skills would you like to continue practicing and learning about?

Do you think you would benefit from repeating some of the exercises in this book? If so, when will you work on them? (Make a solid commitment so it's likely to happen.)

Change doesn't usually happen in a straight line and it usually doesn't happen as quickly as we'd like. If you feel discouraged about the change process, remember to give your expectations a reality check. Chances are that you're expecting too much of yourself and more self-compassion is in order.

How can you give yourself self-compassion if you feel discouraged that change isn't happening as quickly or easily as you'd like?

Post-holiday reflections

Don't just tuck this book away in a drawer when the holidays are over. Instead, take some time to reflect on the holidays. There's much to be learned from both your successes and your failures.

What worked?

What didn't work?

Did anything go better than you expected?

What did you learn?

What will you try to do differently next year?

Are you holding onto any grudges or resentments? Or are you upset with yourself? If so, how can you begin to release these negative feelings?

Nobody has a perfect holiday. For most of us, they're a mixed bag – some good and some not so good. And learning to cope, set boundaries, and do what's right for us is a work in progress. I hope this workbook helped you make some meaningful changes this holiday season and that you'll continue to grow and practice these skills.