

## **TIPS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, FAMILY GATHERINGS, OR SPECIAL EVENTS**

Big gatherings, holidays, and large events may cause difficulties for friends and family members of a loved one with a mental health condition. Family members/ friends may struggle to balance the needs of their loved one that has a mental illness along with the desires of other relatives' and friends' celebration plans.

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS YOU MAY NOT HAVE CONSIDERED WHEN PLANNING**

Be mindful if the person has religious delusions or thinking. Don't force the person to attend a religious function or listen to the reading of religious materials or stories.

If your loved one has auditory hallucinations and becomes upset when there are too many competing sounds, you may want to:

- play music at a lower volume
- limit the number of people in the environment

Consider providing a less stimulating visual atmosphere like simpler decorations and lighting.

### **ASSESS YOUR UNIQUE SITUATION**

Consider the problem areas your loved one has and their capabilities before you make plans.

- Does he/she make sense when they are talking?
- Can your loved one listen to reason and make compromises?
- Do they have the patience to participate in decision-making?
- Is your loved one oppositional?
- Do they have fixated delusional ideas or themes that dominate their actions?
- Can my loved one tolerate more than one person at a time or a small crowd?
- Are there things you can do to make your loved one feel more comfortable?

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIORITIZING**

Before you decide what you can do to make things more manageable, you must know what you are willing to do or compromise on. You should be clear about which parts of the celebration are really important and traditional to you and your family/friends. Consider the whole picture, not just your loved one with a mental illness. You may decide the priority is:

- a large family dinner
- house or event decorations religious services
- music
- gifts

Discuss this with your family, spouse, partner, friends, or who you plan celebrations with and list all aspects that are considered important. You might want to put your list in order ranking the most important to the least important.

If you are trying to make holidays and events more manageable for the person with a mental health condition, you may have to make these occasions more "ordinary". Making them more ordinary may help to get through the holiday/ event without a crisis.

If you have to give up something, at least consider in advance what you value most. Compromise is not necessarily a "win or lose" proposition. It is a decision- making process that involves weighing the pros and the cons and making a decision based on them.

### **TIPS FOR PEERS COPING WITH HOLIDAYS, GATHERINGS, AND EVENTS**

People with mental health conditions can have more difficulty with the unexpected and change in routine than do others and can sometimes experience holidays and gatherings as negative events.

Hectic schedules, numerous activities, large and frequent gatherings, high volume of noise and increased visual stimulation associated with joyous occasions can lead to feelings of anxiety, confusion, depression, reappearance of symptoms, as well as unwelcome changes in eating, sleeping, energy level, and daily functioning. Here are some tips to help cope with stressful and chaotic times:

- Stay close to family and friends who understand your condition
- Take your medications as prescribed. Be sure to get the sleep you need. Celebrate holidays and events in ways that are comfortable for you.
- The holiday season doesn't stop feelings of loneliness or sadness. Give yourself permission to work through these feelings.
- Talk about how you feel with family and friends.
- Keep expectations manageable. Plan your work and then work your plan. Set a budget and stick with it. A phone call may mean more than a gift. Do something nice for someone else.
- Do something nice for yourself.
- Stay out of the malls and stores if it is difficult.
- Play your favorite music.
- Reflect on positive memories and try to build on them.
- Don't allow yourself to dwell on the negative. If negative thoughts come, acknowledge them and let them go. Return to a positive thought or memory. Don't beat yourself up for having a negative thought.
- Sometimes holidays can seem to magnify negative or difficult feelings. It can be a little easier to get through holidays when you look for things to appreciate and focus your thoughts on those positives.

- Do your best not to dwell on past unhappy memories.
- Do work through unresolved grief.
- Do remember that there be a difference between the ideal holiday image and the reality of one's life. Try your best not to dwell on disappointments you may experience.
- Remember, celebrations are what you make of them. Make them comfortable for you and create new memories.