



# Twelve Ideas to Help People with Eating Disorders Negotiate the Holidays

Courtesy of: Center for Change / Compiled by: Michael E. Berrett, PhD

- 1.** Eat regularly and in some kind of reasonable pattern. Avoid "preparing for the last supper." Don't skip meals and starve in attempt to make up for what you recently ate or are about to eat. Keep a regular and moderate pattern.
- 2.** Worry more about the size of your heart than the size of your hips! It is the holiday season, a great time to reflect, enjoy relationships with loved ones, and most importantly a time to feel gratitude for blessings received and a time to give back through loving service to others.
- 3.** Discuss your anticipations of the holidays with your therapist, physician, dietitian, or other members of your treatment team so that they can help you predict, prepare for, and get through any uncomfortable family interactions without self destructive coping attempts.
- 4.** Have a well thought out game plan before you go home or invite others into your home. Know "where the exits are," where your support persons are, and how you'll know when it's time to make a brief exit and get connected with needed support.
- 5.** Talk with loved ones about important issues: decisions, victories, challenges, fears, concerns, dreams, goals, special moments, spirituality, relationships and your feelings about them. Allow important themes to be present and allow yourself to have fun rather than rigidly focusing on food or body concerns.
- 6.** Choose, ahead of time, someone to call if you are struggling with addictive behaviors, or with negative thoughts, or difficult emotions. Call them ahead of time and let them know of your concerns, needs, and the possibility of them receiving a call from you.



## **Continued: Twelve Ideas to Help People with Eating Disorders Negotiate the Holidays**

- 7.** If it would be a support or help to you, consider choosing one loved one to be your "reality check" with food, to either help plate up food for you, or to give you a reality check on the food portions which you dish up for yourself.
- 8.** Write down your vision of where you would like your mind and heart to be during this holiday time with loved ones. Take time, several times per day, to find a quiet place to become in tune again with your vision, to remember, to nurture, and to center yourself into those thoughts, feelings, and actions which are congruent with your vision for yourself.
- 9.** If you have personal goals for your time with loved ones during the holidays, focus the goals around what you would like to do. Make your goals about "doing something" rather than about trying to prevent something. If you have food goals, then make sure you also add personal emotional, spiritual, and relationship goals as well.
- 10.** Work on being flexible in your thoughts. Learn to be flexible in guidelines for yourself, and in expectations of yourself and others. Strive to be flexible in what you can eat during the holidays. Take a holiday from self imposed criticism, rigidity, and perfectionism.
- 11.** Stay active in your support group, or begin activity if you are currently not involved. Many support groups can be helpful. 12-step group, co-dependency group, eating disorder therapy group, neighborhood "Bunco" game group, and religious or spiritually oriented groups are examples of groups which may give real support. Isolation and withdrawal from positive support is not the right answer for getting through trying times.
- 12.** Avoid "overstressing" and "overbooking" yourself and avoid the temptation and pattern of becoming "too busy." A lower sense of stress can decrease a felt need to go to eating disorder behaviors or other unhelpful coping strategies. Cut down on unnecessary events and obligations and leave time for relaxation, contemplation, reflection, spiritual renewal, simple service, and enjoying the small yet most important things in life. This will help you experience and enjoy a sense of gratitude and peace.

