

## **Your Going Home for the Holidays Survival Guide**

Your parents are fighting or you're having two holiday dinners, one at your mom's and the next at your dad's. Uncle Larry drinks too much. Your Aunt Betty won't stop talking about her love life. Grandma Gertrude is describing each of her physical ailments in graphic detail. That's right, the Holidays are here.

As much as you might want to, resist the urge to tell Grandma Gertrude to shut it or join Uncle Larry at the spiked punchbowl. No matter how bad it gets, keep telling yourself it's only a few days (or weeks) of torture. Soon you'll get back to your regular life here at DU, and you can tell your counselor all about it.

If you lose your focus and allow yourself to get sucked into other's negative behavior, it may take you until the end of winter quarter to fully recover. On the other hand, by accepting your "relative reality," you can manage the holidays and get back to being yourself by the New Year.

### **12 Tips for Managing Going Home for the Holidays**

- 1. Be realistic.** Get those Hollywood movies out of your head. The people in them were being paid to look happy. Reality is sometimes more like the Griswold's or the Bickerson's than it is the Brady Bunch. Keep your expectations reasonable.
- 2. Be true to yourself.** Relatives are, by definition, people you are related to. You may love them, but you don't have to like them. You are not obligated to call up feelings you don't have. Even if you may strongly dislike some of them, you can be with family for holidays because you love, or like, just one relative or someone else who will be there.
- 3. Be civil.** The last thing you want is for your negative reaction or to overshadow your relatives' bad behavior. Believe it or not, just be civil may be all your crazy Aunt Betty wanted from you in the first place.
- 4. Be prepared.** When hot-button issues surface, figure out a couple of ways that you might manage your reaction ahead of time. If your mom's lecture on your grades or your dad's tirade about your ex is one of the holiday tapes that gets played over and over, have a couple of subject-changing activities planned.
- 5. Be choosy.** You're probably not crazy. You just think you are after being locked in a house for a week with people that treat you as if you are still eleven, can't stop talking about themselves, or have beliefs radically different from your own. But, bad holidays do require a little recovery time. Consider who you choose to talk to about your holiday experience or maybe journal instead. Why? Because if it's really bad, most people just won't get it and will say something irritating like, "it can't be that bad" or "you're exaggerating." You're not. They just don't know your family, and probably don't need to.
- 6. Plan, Plan, Plan.** Difficult relatives may see down time as prime time to drive you nuts. Your holidays will run more smoothly if there are plenty of activities to fill the gaps. Don't rely on television to solve this problem because even 200 HD channels sometimes won't be enough to stop Grandma Gertrude's tirade about her colon. Have a few activities in your pocket like getting involved with cooking, board games, charades, baking and decorating holiday treats.

**7. Have an exit strategy.** Plan a definite exit time and schedule some alone time for yourself to recharge. Don't leave your exit dates or time to be alone to chance with people who tend to be overbearing or are experts on sending you on a guilt trip.

**8. Safety in numbers.** It sounds crazy, but think about inviting more people to your holiday. When there are fifty people in attendance, it is much more difficult for a diva to be a diva. There will be just too many people's attention to hold.

**9. Focus on the kids.** Babies and little kids don't fully understand weird family dynamics. Most of the time, talk about babies is usually safe. But of course, if kid chat is where your family usually falls apart, don't go that way.

**10. Focus on the less fortunate.** If, for example, at your holiday celebration, everyone brings a gift for Toys for Tots or some other charity group, part of your discussion will naturally revolve around that instead of Uncle Larry's drinking.

**11. Change.** Change could happen or not happen within your family and friends. This is the great unknown, how will your family and friends be similar and different. How are you similar and different? Take time to talk about these issues and create reasonable expectations within your family and with your friends around this new chapter in your lives.

**12. Balancing.** Going home can be stressful trying to cram in seeing everyone and doing everything that you used to do in a whole year in the small time you are home. Set realistic expectations for yourself and how much you can do. Know that disappointment is an inevitable part of going home in that you can't please everyone, so take a minute and decide what is most important and do that.

Family celebrations aren't always happy, but they are part of our cultural calendar. The more you can prepare and manage their impact, the less stressed out you'll be. Go forth armed and ready.

Happy Holidays!