



Authentic Trainings, LLC
PRACTICAL, RELATABLE, & COMPASSIONATE

Navigating the Holidays:

A Guide for Families of Individuals with Substance Use Disorder

Holidays can be a challenging time for families affected by substance use disorder (SUD). This guide offers practical tips grounded in the **THRIVE** framework and **CRAFT (Community Reinforcement and Family Training)** strategies to help you create a supportive and balanced holiday season.

THRIVE Family Recovery Resources

“The mission of Thrive! Family Recovery Resources is to bring hope, help, and healing to the families of loved ones struggling with substance use disorder by providing resources, peer support, education, advocacy, and healing connections with compassion, understanding, and love.”

1. THRIVE: Principles for Families Navigating SUD

The THRIVE approach encourages families to focus on well-being, resilience, and intentionality.

T – Take care of yourself first

- **Prioritize self-care:** Set aside time for activities that recharge you, like exercise, meditation, or connecting with supportive friends.
- **Set boundaries:** Recognize your limits and communicate them respectfully. For example, decide in advance which behaviors you will not tolerate at family gatherings.

H – Hold realistic expectations

- **Anticipate challenges:** Holidays often bring stressors, so prepare for potential triggers or conflicts without expecting perfection.
- **Focus on progress, not perfection:** Acknowledge small steps your loved one has taken in their recovery journey.

R – Reinforce positive behaviors

- **Acknowledge their efforts:** Celebrate any positive choices your loved one makes, whether small or significant.
- **Avoid shaming:** Stay mindful of language that might unintentionally lead to guilt or shame.

- **Use the 24 hour rule:** Avoid bringing up anything that has happened prior to the last 24 hours. Allow the family to be fully present in the moment.

I – Involve others

- **Lean on support networks:** Engage other family members, friends, recovery coaches, or self-help groups to share responsibilities and provide encouragement. There are 24 hr. help-lines, on-line meetings and social media groups that can provide support.
- **Explore family therapy:** Professional guidance can help improve communication and address deep-rooted dynamics.

V – Value your loved one, separate from their SUD

- **Express unconditional love:** Remind your loved one of their value as a person, regardless of their current struggles. Maintain a loving and open attitude.
- **Avoid defining them by their SUD:** Use person-first language like, "My loved one who is facing addiction," rather than "addict."

E – Engage in meaningful activities

- **Create new traditions:** Plan substance-free, inclusive activities that foster connection, like board games, cooking together, or volunteering as a family.
- **Keep it simple:** Avoid overloading your schedule to reduce stress for everyone involved.
- **Allow your loved one to leave gracefully:** They may not be able to stay the entire time. Perhaps, dinner is all they can manage.

2. CRAFT Recommendations for Family Dynamics

CRAFT emphasizes enhancing communication, understanding, and collaboration between family members and individuals with SUD. Change the way you communicate for a better outcome.

Improve Communication

- **Use “I” statements:** Express feelings in a neutral tone, without placing blame. For example, "I feel worried when you don't come home as planned."
- **Practice active listening:** Focus on understanding their perspective without interrupting or judging. Try to put yourself in their shoes. Respond by reflecting on what you heard. Don't try to give a solution.
- **Avoid confrontational moments:** Address concerns when everyone is calm, not in the heat of an argument. Have conversations, not confrontational moments.

Set Positive Goals

- **Focus on what you want to happen:** Instead of dwelling on negatives, frame your goals positively. For example, "I hope we can enjoy dinner together peacefully."

- **Be specific:** Share clear expectations like, "We will have a substance-free gathering," and we want you to be there. Discuss alternatives if challenges arise like: I will understand if you have to leave early.

Reinforce Healthy Behaviors

- **Reward positive actions:** Praise or show appreciation when your loved one makes healthy choices, like attending a meeting.
- **Ignore negative behaviors:** When possible, avoid focusing on unproductive or harmful actions unless safety is at risk. Acceptance allows you to reinforce positive behavior.

Encourage Treatment Options

- **Discuss recovery options:** Use a neutral tone to suggest resources like counseling or 12-step groups. These are suggestions, not demands. Maintaining your connection has been shown to have positive results.
 - **Model openness:** Share your own experiences with seeking help or self-improvement to normalize the process.
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3. Practical Tips for the Holiday Season

Plan Ahead

- **Have a safety plan:** If return to use occurs, know in advance how you'll respond. For example, identify a safe space your loved one can retreat to or designate a support person to assist.
- **Limit alcohol availability:** Consider hosting substance-free events or ensuring non-alcoholic options are abundant and appealing.

Prepare for Emotional Triggers

- **Identify triggers:** Recognize situations, people, or places that might provoke stress or cravings for your loved one.
- **Offer alternatives:** Suggest coping strategies like stepping outside for fresh air, calling a support buddy, or journaling.

Build a Supportive Environment

- **Reduce shame:** Avoid discussions about their past mistakes or making their SUD the centerpiece of family conversations.
 - **Stay flexible:** Be prepared to adapt plans if your loved one is struggling or unable to participate.
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4. Resources for Support

- **CRAFT Training:** Available through organizations like the **Center for Motivation and Change** or **Learn to Cope**.
 - **THRIVE support groups are available on-line.** [Thrive Family Recovery Resources](#)
 - **AL-Anon and Nar-Anon:** Support groups for families affected by substance use.
 - **SAMHSA's Helpline:** Call 1-800-662-HELP for confidential support and resources.
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By combining the principles of THRIVE and CRAFT, families can navigate the holiday season with empathy, resilience, and hope. Your commitment to both your well-being and the recovery of your loved one is a powerful step toward healing.