

Your Sober Holiday Survival Guide

A HOW-TO GUIDE ON MAINTAINING RECOVERY DURING THE STRESS AND JOY OF THE SEASON

with Caroline Beidler, MSW



We can stay sober and have an awesome holiday season in recovery!

Hi Friend!

The holidays can be stressful, especially for those of us in recovery. Whether that is recovery from substance use, food addiction, co-dependent relationships, or pretty much anything at all (I believe that we are all in recovery from something!), the holidays can put a stress on our recovery journeys. Even good stress can be challenging.

Because of this, I wanted to create a resource that can help guide your journey in recovery through the holiday season--or any season--you might find yourself in. In these pages, you will find a quick survival guide that will walk with you through the challenges of the season.

In this guide, you will learn ways to:

- (1) Understand your holiday triggers**
- (2) 4 ways to respond in healthy ways**
- (3) Support others who are struggling**

We never have to do life alone, friend. I am so glad we are on this journey together!

Wishing you joy, peace, and continued sobriety this holiday season.

With hope,

Caroline

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SESSION ONE

What are my holiday triggers?

Triggers are people, places, or things that can remind us of who we've been and what we've done (or not done) and perhaps, what's been done to us. They can be very challenging for those of us in recovery from addiction, mental health, trauma or all of the above.

According to NAMI, "A trigger, sometimes referred to as a stressor, is an action or situation that can lead to an adverse emotional reaction." Recognizing our triggers and being aware of what causes us stress, can be the first step in helping to prevent the mind and body from spiraling. For many folks (we are raising our hands here) the holidays, themselves, can be triggering. Times when we experienced challenging family dynamics, disappointment, and sometimes worse.

What are your triggers?

- Make a list of holiday triggers on one side of a piece of paper (or multiple papers).
- Include people, places, and things that might cause you stress.
- Some examples might be:

Specific Family Members

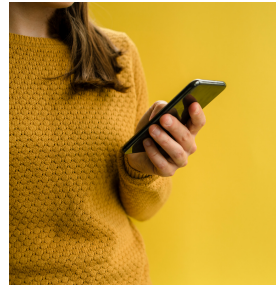
Certain foods or drinks

Days of the year (for example, New Year's Eve)

Ex-partners or old friends

An outfit or hairstyle

Smells (like apple cider or turkey gravy)



SESSION TWO

What does it feel like to be triggered?

Triggers can impact us in many ways. Sometimes triggers feel like trauma symptoms and can propel the body and our nervous systems into a state that causes us to be unable to self-regulate. In other words, we are in overdrive.

Our systems can get all sorts of messed up and get stuck in the “on” position. This can lead us to be overstimulated, unable to calm and always in a state of “fight or flight” or near it. Or if not this—feeling numb or detached or disassociated.

In other words, not exactly feeling the “holiday cheer.”

You may be able to relate with being overwhelmed by anxiety, anger, restlessness, panic, and hyperactivity. These are symptoms that can all present after being triggered during the holidays. This all sounds pretty bleak, right? Well, we’d like to assure you that it doesn’t have to stay that way.

So what’s the good news?

The good news is that we don’t have to stay stuck or triggered. There are things we can do, actions we can take, and tools that can help guide us back to ourselves and to a place of joy and peace this holiday season.



“We don’t have to stay stuck in our triggers or trauma symptoms.”

Caroline Beidler, MSW



Reflection:
How do you feel when you are triggered?

SESSION THREE

What are ways to build resilience?

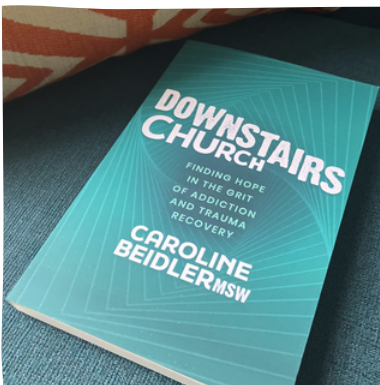
The American Psychological Association defines resilience this way:

"Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences."

Another term for resilience is "mental fortitude" or the ability to rationally endure adversity. Fortitude is defined as "courage in pain and adversity." Its synonyms are words such as backbone, grit, and perseverance.

These words all paint a picture of resilience – bearing with struggles, continuing on through the pain, doing the right thing in spite of fear.

There is a way to build resilience in our lives--and it's going to take action.



Send me a message to get a free copy of my latest book.

SESSION FOUR

Holiday Survival Tip #1: Get Moving

Holiday triggers can cause havoc on your mind and body—adding stress and all sorts of overloads of chemicals found in your body like cortisol. Over time, an increase in “hyper-arousal” or a constant state of fear for your body can be harmful for your health.

Movement or exercise helps you to expend excess adrenaline caused by hyper-arousal and also release endorphins which is your body’s own feel-good sauce. Overtime, movement and exercise can actually repair harm that has been done to your nervous system.

- Try to exercise for 30 minutes or more on most days. You can also do 10-minute spurts of exercise throughout the day as well.
- Exercise that is rhythmic is great for your mind and is healthy as it moves different parts of your body, including your arms and legs like walking or running, dancing, swimming, aerobic classes, HITT workouts, group activities like basketball or volleyball
- Add a mindfulness element. Focusing on your breathing can help to relax you during activity as well. Rock climbing, boxing, weight training, or martial arts are all other examples of mindful activities that connect your body with your mind.



SESSION FIVE

Holiday Survival Tip #2: Self-Regulate

Self-regulation (in the non-science way to talk about it) is the practice of loving self-control. We can find and learn ways to calm and even change the arousal system in our bodies that is responsible for triggers or trauma responses.

Our old ways of self-regulation and coping included lots of unhealthy coping strategies to self-regulate. It is freeing when we learn that there are healthy ways that we can learn to regulate our minds and bodies.

A couple ways to self-regulate:

- Mindful breathing
- Being in nature
- Grounding exercise
- Pray or meditate
- Read a book
- Call a friend or someone who needs support
- Do other actions that get us out of our heads
- Go to a recovery meeting or small group

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

-2 Timothy 1:7



SESSION SIX

Holiday Survival Tip #3: Connect in Community

Connecting in community or building social support is one of the most helpful ways we can build resilience and survive the stress of the holiday season. There is also something beautiful and powerful about knowing that we aren't alone.

Maybe the people you spend the holidays with aren't the most healthy or supportive. We can choose to spend time with people that are healthy this holiday! Making sure we have recovery-affirming folks in our life who can be there as a support and also help hold us accountable can be healing during the holidays.

How can we connect in community over the holidays?

- Join a new group, organization, service opportunity, or faith community and get involved (being of service can help us to connect with others and find social support, too)
- Find or host a sober/recovery event or activity in your community
- Reach out for virtual support (I love the [SHE RECOVERS Foundation](#), [In the Rooms](#), and lots of other platforms to connect virtually with other folks)
- Follow recovery-affirming folks and organizations on social media for daily tips, inspiration, and more
- Check out [Circle of Chairs](#) and read stories from people thriving in recovery



SESSION SEVEN

Holiday Survival Tip #4: Give Back

When we focus on being of service and helping others, we can get out of our heads and our own ways. It is easy to say we don't have time or are too busy, but imagine all of the time spent doing unhealthy things over the holidays (including having intrusive thoughts). This holiday season, one of the most helpful things we can do for our own recoveries and lives is to find ways to give back to the community. There are so many ways to do this, especially over the holidays. Here are a few ideas of ways that you can give back:

- Start a holiday drive to gather donations for a local shelter, recovery home, or church
- Make something to share like a meal, a piece of art, or photograph
- Call someone in early recovery to say hi and listen
- Connect with an organization that serves un-housed individuals and connect
- Make a donation to a local charity or give them a call to see how you can be of service
- Show up early to a recovery meeting and stay late and introduce yourself to a new comer
- Share a favorite book with someone who you think will benefit from the message ([contact Caroline](#) for a free copy of her latest book [Downstairs Church](#) to share)

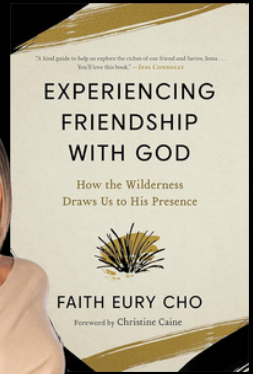
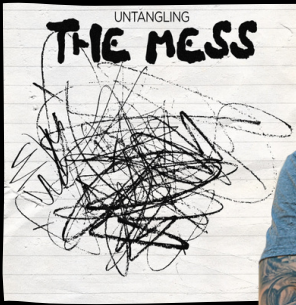


We can survive and thrive this holiday season.

No matter where you are on your journey, know that you can take healthy actions that reduce stressful triggers, build resilience, and promote growth in your life and recovery.

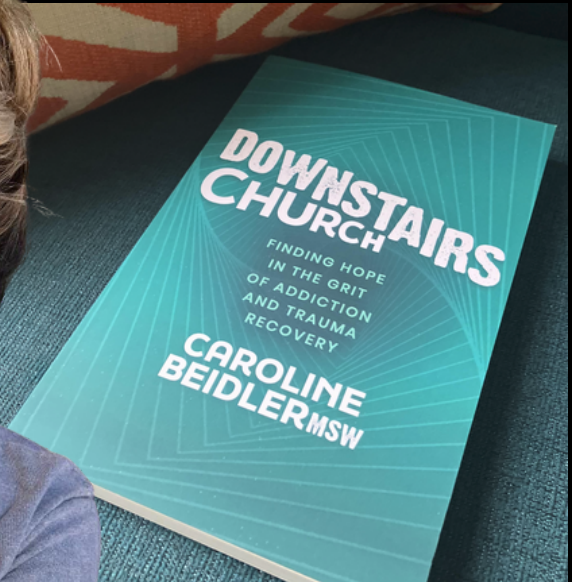
*with hope,
Caroline Beidler, MSW*

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