

# The Best Present for the Holidays... Is to be *Present* for the Holidays

By Theresa Hubbard, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

**H**ere they come...the Holidays. For some, they are a time of excitement, planning, joy and sharing. For others, they signal the beginning of months they would rather avoid altogether. We can spend weeks preparing excuses for not attending this or that event. It can become more difficult to get up in the morning. We may start to feel guilty about everything we have done, haven't done, said or haven't said. We may emotionally become some much younger age and demand this or that.

## The Holidays Can Trigger a Reliving of Negative Experiences

We are designed to remember events that are significant to us, whether they are positive or negative, though memory of the negative events tends to be greater in number. During the holidays, the opportunities to re-experience those significant events increase considerably. The holidays can trigger a reliving of many of our negative experiences. Whether it was the bicycle you never received, the sibling who always got more (and/or better) gifts than you did, your favorite relative who wasn't present because they passed away, all of these events and many more lay the foundation for how we experience the holidays in the present. Each one of your past experiences creates the lens through which you see your present experiences.

Due to these experiences, we are often not present in the present. Our thoughts, emotions, and body memory can be caught in a jumbled maze of reliving the past and anticipating the future, leaving us in a foggy haze in the present. By making a concerted effort to stay present in each present moment, we can more fully and positively experience the holidays.



## Ways to Stay Present for the Holidays

**1. Engage all of your senses** – find things that, when experienced sensorily, create a feeling of being relaxed and aware of what is happening around you. Find something for each one of your senses – sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. Maybe it is the smell of citrus, the sound of drums, the taste of really good chocolate, the feel of your favorite sheets, or the blue of a clear sky. Spend some time experimenting with different things. Once you have some things picked out, have some of them with you wherever you are – your car, work, bedside table – wherever you are likely to spend time.

**2. Keep breathing** – most of us are unaware that we are holding our breath, or breathing very shallow. Take a moment now and notice whether you are breathing deeply. Work on increasing the number of seconds that you take to breathe in and breathe out. For this exercise, work on getting up to five seconds in, and five seconds out.

**3. Look around you** – notice the colors, textures, and shapes of the things around you. Spend two minutes really taking everything in, and then close your eyes and picture it all as if your eyes were open.

**4. Be grateful** – as you look around at the people you are spending the holidays with, list one thing for which you are grateful about each person. You may have to get creative for that whacky aunt or curmudgeonly uncle, but you can do it, trust me.

**5. Hold another's perspective** – as you are looking around the room, take a moment to remember what is going on in each of their lives – death of a loved one, job loss, a move. Even if everything looks to be perfect for them, it isn't. The point isn't to create problems, but to take the perspective of another, to see life through their lens.

**6. Push yourself beyond your comfort zone** – if you realize that you most often spend the holidays talking to the same few people, push yourself, and go up to someone that you don't know as well; spend some time asking them about their life.

All of these things help us to stay as present as we can in the moment. If you become aware over the holidays that doing these things are difficult for you, reach out for help. Increased stress and depression are common around the holidays. You don't have to feel alone. There are professionals in many different areas of expertise that can help us to cope and be more present in our lives.

Be Present for the Holidays. That is the best present we can give to ourselves and to those around us.

## Passionate About Helping People Heal

I am passionate about helping people heal, treating individuals, couples and families from age 3 years old to adults. My practice includes, but is not limited to, treating trauma, anxiety, depression, life cycle changes, relationship issues, parenting concerns, and low self worth. I offer a safe, comfortable, calming space for clients and am dedicated to supporting and enhancing the health and well-being of individuals, couples and families. To learn more or to schedule an appointment, please call 816-591-3006 or visit online at [TheresaHubbard.com](http://TheresaHubbard.com).

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