

# How to **Brave** the Holiday Season

The holiday season is the time of the year when there might be some extra relational demands of us. While the festive season is generally a happy time, the reflections and celebrations can also be challenging. There are expectations; from family members with whom we may share some difficult history, or perhaps the opposite - we may find that we don't have enough people to share in our experience.

Below is a small list of skills I've put together for you on the occasions when you might find yourself overwhelmed. The exercises are adapted from Somatic Experiencing®, The Daring Way™ (Brené Brown's work), and are also informed by the Polyvagal Theory.



**B**reathe. Wherever you are, this is the easiest option to start regulating your nervous system. Practice three counts in-breath (via the nose) and five counts out-breath (via the mouth), pushing the air out. Repeat this sequence three times and practice at least three times a day. This technique will help you to engage the calming part of your nervous system - the part we refer to as the parasympathetic nervous system.

**R**emember a recent day or time when you felt most like yourself. It could be a day when you had a good session at yoga, a superb coffee in bed, or that time you spent with people who you connect to. It can be anything really. As you remember, and recall the sense of being most like yourself, feel the sensory experience of that. You may have a sense of expansion into your chest, maybe you feel tall or a sense of spaciousness in your stomach. Stay with the experience and let it grow in your body. You can practice this for a couple minutes per day. This can be really useful in situations when other people's thoughts and actions can get overwhelming, like a Christmas gathering :)



**A**wareness or orienting is a skill that you can also practice anywhere and anytime. When you reach a location, take a couple of minutes to arrive. Notice your feet, then if you are sitting down, notice the support that the seat provides. Slowly, gently moving your head, neck and eyes, look around. This seems very simple I know, but it helps your nervous system to relax by giving you chance to reduce any implicit triggers and to notice safety.



Values are the lights that help us to show up in difficult situations, as Brené Brown says. So, carrying our values inside our bodies when we show up to a difficult holiday gathering can make a difference. Choose a couple of your values; compassion, or gratitude or maybe integrity. Think of one of them and check in with your body - where do you notice this value? Is it in your heart or more in your stomach? Don't mind if this does not make sense in a cognitive way, we are looking for sensory experiences here. Stay with the sensation of the value, see if a colour comes up, see if there is a shape that is appearing, and go on like that, finding all the sensory details that you can. You will see how good it feels noticing that this value that is so important to you already lives inside you, and it will support you in challenging situations.



Empathy is not an easy skill to practice in difficult relational situations. I still suggest to go with; 'everyone is doing the best they can, with the tools they have in that moment'. If you find yourself in tricky situations where, for example, your aunt makes comments about your body at a NYE gathering, instead of getting really angry or hurt, think about why is that so important for her? Did she learn somewhere maybe that looking a little different can be dangerous? Was she bullied when she was your age because of how she looked? These are just ideas, but you get the drift. Go easy, go kind with yourself and with others. You can also gently tell this aunt that you feel fabulous in your skin and hopefully she does too.

Wishing you a safe, peaceful and fun Holiday Season.

Love from

Andi

Brave Therapy™

