



Relationships over the Holidays

Inevitably, holidays stir relationships. We may see people we don't normally see. We may have associations with holiday that others don't share. Others will let us know when we're acting in ways that support their needs by affirming us, or by not stirring the waters (they may not say thank you, but they're less likely to be annoyed with us). They will also let us know when we're acting in ways that don't support their needs. This has been the time-tested experience of being human in relationship.

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- While you may spend the holiday with family, you need not be overwhelmed by old dynamics nor do you need to revert to old behavior strategies (which might look like ones we used when we were little, when we didn't have words yet – pouting, temper tantrum, crying, pleading, sleeping, etc).
- Even if you don't spend the holiday with family members, you may still experience the flush of family-generated messaging that affects your emotional body to this day.
- Yoga recommends two specific tools for navigating this terrain:

Acknowledge
the Humanity
in Others



Set Clear Boundaries
to Protect & Nourish
your Wisest Self



Acknowledging the humanity in others is to remember them as someone, once newly born and vulnerable, who was subject to conditioning and training, through mimicry; and then subject to further training through school, culture, church, social clubs, and so on. It is to see the humanity underneath all of that conditioning as well as to remember that sometimes it's their conditioning that's acting the strongest (and quite habitually so!) instead of their current self, or their fresh self, or their most wise or vital self.

This may lead to empathy without conditions. We can experience empathy towards other people without having to engage with them interpersonally. Sometimes we'll be able to. Sometimes we won't. Sometimes it'll be their skill set is too lacking, whereas other times our vulnerability may need to be protected (we are the one who may not be able to interact).

Acknowledge Their Humanity



- Remember them as once newly born.
- Remember them as having experienced molding, shaping, and conditioning.
- Remember them as having experienced further social training through school, church, jobs, etc.
- Remember them as someone who, just like all others, will die someday and be returned to ashes and dust.
- Remember them as someone who has the fight-flight-freeze-submit programming that you also have.
- Remember them as someone who has the seeds of potential for all human expression – even if they’re not expressing it well.
- Open yourself to the possibility of empathy or compassion towards them.
- Reflect on the nature of the boundaries you may need to protect your ability to experience empathy

Set Clear Boundaries



- **Within yourself**, set boundaries on the part of your mind that entices or engages in negative thinking.
- **Within yourself**, set boundaries on the part that spends energy justifying, reviewing, scheming, hyper-planning, etc.
- **From your heart**, intuit how much exposure, in time & proximity, you feel you can enjoy (or tolerate) with specific people.
- **From your heart**, intuit what the best outcome in those experiences could be.
- **Actively cultivate the heart quality** that could produce that outcome (is it generosity, patience, forgiveness, willingness, softness, respect, etc?).
- **With difficult circumstances**, pro-actively state your boundaries ahead of time (don't procrastinate this) so that you have already advocated for yourself; and you have already notified them (so that they won't feel surprised).

Boundaries Related To Time:

The following examples demonstrate boundaries that are more mild up to more firm. It might seem scary to set boundaries like this with others, but please remember:

This is a YES to your vitality, resilience and well-being.

This is not a “NO” to the other people.

- I would really enjoy attending [the gathering]. I can join you for about 45 minutes.
- I'll be able to arrive at 6 pm, but I will have to leave promptly at 7 pm. I have another responsibility (engagement, commitment) that night, too.
- I've been really over-scheduled and I won't be able to join you. However, I would enjoy dropping off a [house warming gift, holiday offering, etc].
- I won't be able to come. I have too many other obligations and I'm already feeling challenged to stay balanced amidst it all. I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Boundaries Related To Proximity:

Spending time with others can be nourishing, inspiring, and meaningful. But it can also feel stressful and draining.

Say YES to your personal sovereignty.

Other people are not in charge of your opinions or feelings about yourself, nor about life.

- Reflect on your preferred way to spend time with someone, based on your experience of your relationship with them. Is it “parallel activity” (like watching TV, doing a puzzle, or hiking)? Or in deep conversation with a cup of tea? Or something in between?
- Next consider the time of day or amount of time that you would want to share. In the case of some relationships, you will want to know the “limit” of time that you can share.
- If things are not in your “control” around social gatherings and variables, use the Acknowledging the Humanity in Others technique to buffer yourself from challenging people, or to support your nervous system for social stamina.

Boundaries With Difficult People:

Challenging or difficult people may also have their own painful histories and adaptations. That doesn't mean that we need to perpetuate the dance that their life has created.

- **PARALLEL PLAY:** I am looking forward to seeing [you, the family, etc]. I'll plan to bring [a couple of puzzles, a board game, a special movie] to share with everyone.
- **PERSONAL PACING:** Thank you for the invite. Joining you would make for a very long day for me. However, I would love to see you. I'll plan to stop by for [15, 30 minutes]. I appreciate you understanding that I can't join the whole visit.
- **SAYING YES + NO:** I'd be glad to come and be with everyone for a visit. I'll plan to arrive at [XXX time XXX] so that I can spend time with you all. I won't be able to [arrive for Happy Hour, stay for dessert, join the karaoke afterparty]. But I would love to [have some tea, watch a movie, play a kids game].

Prioritize Your Resilience

In Hunger, Hope & Healing, during the first phase of recovery, we focus on Personal Buoyancy - AKA Personal Resilience. The Body Dashboard outlines seven foundational commitments for cultivating physiological resilience. Sign up for the Hunger, Hope and Healing Newsletter to gain access to the downloadable Body Dashboard Handout under “Free Resources”!

