

Winter 2012 eBook

# Addiction & the Holiday Season



The Recovery Place

Call toll free: (866) 205.6531

Free your family from addiction today!

## Forward

The holiday season typically starts buzzing around the first of November. People put their costumes away and start writing shopping lists and planning for the upcoming family get-togethers.

A family entrapped by alcohol and drug addiction is forced to write a different story. Family gatherings are overshadowed by the many consequences of addiction, addicts continue their spiral of abuse, and individuals in recovery flirt with relapse. But, why?



The holiday season is saturated with stress from the season's high expectations. The stress can hinder an individual's judgment or spark a battle with depression—a common factor in alcohol and drug addiction.

This eBook will take you and your family through the different aspects of handling addiction during the holiday season: what to avoid, why you should go to drug rehab during the winter months, how to maintain sobriety while surrounded by triggers, etc.

Read through each chapter carefully and print it out for a handy reference. Don't let alcohol and drug addiction strip away the magic of the holidays. Give the gift of recovery this holiday season.

If you or your loved one is struggling with alcohol and drug addiction, don't hesitate to **call The Recovery Place toll-free at (866) 205 – 6531 for support** in the process. We are here to help!

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## Chapter 1 – Addiction & the Holiday Season

When you think about the holidays, what are the first things that come to mind? You probably just whispered to yourself the likings of family, friends, food, gifts, and celebration.

But what happens to the holiday magic when a **family is dealing with addiction**?



While the holiday season is full of family togetherness and reasons to celebrate, it also brings a lot of stress or focus on the idea that a time of year may not be the solution to all of life's struggles.

The holiday stress can cause individuals struggling with alcohol and drug addiction to find reasons to continue their alcohol and drug abuse. They can also spark an alcohol or drug abuse problem from the heightened prevalence of alcohol and drugs during holiday celebrations.

The rest of this chapter will take a closer look at how the winter months can affect an individual flirting with addiction, an individual already struggling with the disease, and individuals in recovery.

It will also take a closer look at some specific qualities to the holiday season and winter months that affect families struggling with addiction.

## Taking an Alcohol and Drug Addiction Holiday

So you cap off each night with a couple beers or a bottle of wine. It's just how you wind down from the long work day, right?



Wrong. Societal norms have labeled this as normal behavior, but in actuality, if you or a loved one feels as though you need alcohol, a prescription drug, or even a hit off the pipe to “wind down” from the day’s events, an addiction is looming around the bend.

### What can push you over the edge?

While it might be presumptuous of us to say the holiday season is the biggest of all “night-caps” we’re not completely off base. The holiday season has many qualities that often lead to escalating addictions, such as:

- Family pressures
- Financial stress
- Parties that include alcohol and drugs
- Colder or unpleasant weather like rain, snow, wind, etc.
- Feelings of anxiety, depression, or loneliness

The heightened feelings of anxiety and depression during the holiday season are the most worrisome on sparking a full-fledged addiction. Dennis L. Thombs, author of *Introduction to*



*Addictive Behaviors, Third Edition* notes that one contemporary psychoanalytic view of substance abuse is that it is a defense against anxiety.

*Anxiety is a driving force in psychoanalytic theory. When anxiety is overwhelming, a person relies on defense mechanisms such as denial, avoidance, rationalization, regression, projection, etc.*

*- Jann Gumbiner, Ph.D.*

Defense mechanisms such as denial, avoidance and rationalization are what make the individual and their loved ones see the alcohol and drug abuse as acceptable behavior.

Financial stress during the holiday season is another worrisome matter in escalating an addiction. The holiday season has an overwhelming theme of buying and giving gifts in tradition of many religious holidays (celebrated by religious and non-religious families). This added stress to get your children everything they ask for, or find the perfect gift for your husband or wife can build unwanted stress. Can you even afford to hit the stores during this busy time? That looming question can result in abusing alcohol or drugs to relieve the stress.

The holiday season is supposed to be full of love, laughter, family and celebration. Unfortunately for individuals flirting with addiction, it might also be the time of year that accentuates the problem and sparks a full-fledged addiction.

## **An Addiction Gone Unnoticed**

'Tis the season for denial? Maybe.

The holiday season comes with celebration around every corner. Family feasts are typically paired with alcohol cheers, company holiday parties are scheduled for coworkers to let loose, and New Year's Eve takes the cake for outrageous parties saturated with alcohol and drug abuse. These events provide the perfect situations for someone struggling with an addiction to blend into the crowd.

The holiday season is an opportune time for "high functioning addicts" to hide their struggle with the disease.

What are high functioning addicts? They are individuals that suffer from the same disease, but their addiction goes unnoticed because they still maintain a job, take care of their family

responsibilities, or simply seem to have it all together. When in reality, after mom drops her kids off at school, she stops at the liquor store on the way home, or dad's business meetings take place at the corner pub only to return to the office intoxicated.

*While high functioning addicts may be succeeding professionally or academically, they may also be engaging in dangerous behaviors- such as drinking and driving, having risky sexual encounters, and blacking out.*

*- Sarah Allen Benton, a mental health counselor at McLean Hospital in Waltham, Massachusetts*

The holiday season puts people at an exceptionally high risk of continuing their “high functioning” addiction.

### Why?

- Family gatherings put the focus on the overall picture and take away from any individual standing out among the pack. This allows an addict's alcohol and drug abuse to slip through the cracks.
- The winter season is jammed packed with parties in celebration of time off work and specific holidays. These parties put individuals struggling with addiction – or on the brink of full-fledged addiction – in very compromising positions.
- Individuals flirting with taking their drug or alcohol abuse to the next level can be at risk of reaching the breaking point due to heightened holiday pressures and stress.
- The winter months can bring poor weather conditions. Human emotions are often influenced by our surroundings including unwanted muggy weather. Sadness or anger can be driven from cloudy skies and lead individuals to abuse drugs or alcohol to escape those feelings.

### Seasonal Affective Disorder

Also known as SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that occurs at the same time every year. The winter months are commonly associated with SAD because gloomy weather has the tendency to provoke feelings of depression and loneliness.

Individuals suffering from SAD experience symptoms like:

- Increased irritability or anxiety,
- Feelings of despair or hopelessness,
- Social isolation,
- And, sleep disturbances.

## **SAD and Addiction**

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form of depression that is difficult to detect which leaves it commonly unseen or misdiagnosed.

An undiagnosed battle with any form of depression can lead to self-medicating with alcohol or drugs to help ease the feelings of loneliness, anxiety or despair.

*I self-medicated with alcohol for more than 30 years and became addicted to prescription painkillers for about 10 years in a foolish attempt to gain enough control so that I could manage to keep working. The self-medication became the only way, over time, that I could manage to sleep or remain in control enough to function.*

*- Will*

Furthermore, an addiction sparked by self-medicating a battle with depression is a misunderstood addiction. When the addict and his or her loved ones don't understand why the addiction started and how it escalated, it's more difficult to reach a life of recovery.

## **A Season for Relapse?**

One of the looming dangers of the holiday season is one that affects those in recovery from addiction—relapse.

Addiction is a disease...a disease without a cure! Individuals in recovery must constantly monitor and work towards maintaining their life of sobriety. Unfortunately, the heightened stress and many parties during the winter months throw a lot of triggers your way and can threaten relapse.



## Coping with Addiction during the Holidays

The most important thing to keep in mind for those in recovery is to not let the holiday season be an excuse to relapse. Here are a few tips to help you in the process:

- **Stay Alert** – This means getting plenty of sleep, eating right (with occasional holiday treats!), and remembering to take a breath when things get too stressful. In the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, newcomers are encouraged to avoid “HALT”—hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. A more alert you is the version of yourself that will stand up to the challenge and not fall victim to relapse.
- **Say No to Pressure** – This may involve turning down a few holiday party invitations if you know they’ll be saturated with drugs and alcohol. Think of all the hard work you have put into achieving recovery. Better yet, think of how much happier and healthier you are without addiction controlling your life. There’s no sense in threatening those good feelings for one party.



- **Make Your Own Drinks** – Why should it matter what’s in your glass if you are there and everyone is enjoying their time together? While that seems like a silly question, you’d be surprised to find the type of pressure at get-togethers to fill your glass with what everyone else is drinking. Don’t let that be the case! Make your own drinks and don’t bother with what anyone else thinks. Try making drinks that look just as “fun” by using light colored sodas and fresh fruit, or ring in the New Year with apple cider and a handful of confetti. If you’re attending someone else’s party, prepare your host ahead of time to fill your glass with cranberry juice instead of wine, or sparkling cider or ginger ale instead of champagne. That way you can ‘cheers’ with the crowd and not worry about

what others may think or relapsing.

- **Buddy Up** – when you go to any holiday events it might be a good idea to bring along a friend who is also in recovery or just someone that fully understands the situation and supports the actions you are taking to remain sober during this time. Not to mention having a buddy by your side will help curb anxiety, a leading cause of relapse.
- **Call Your Sponsor** – If you feel like you might crack under all the holiday pressure, it's never a bad time to call for support. Odds are, your sponsor has gone through many holiday seasons and dealt with many similar pressures. Having someone to talk to that truly understands your situation will help get you back on track.

This chapter took a closer look at how the holiday season can affect individuals flirting with addiction, addicts already entrapped by the disease, or individuals in recovery. The next chapter will dig a little deeper into the family roles in addiction during the holidays—how to get your loved one to seek drug rehab during a time highlighted by family togetherness and celebration, why it may be best to separate your loved one struggling with addiction from your family during the holidays, and how and why to construct a family intervention.

Please read further for more information on handling addiction during the holiday season and don't hesitate to call to take the steps toward addiction recovery today—(866) 205. 6531.

## Chapter 2 – Family Roles in Holiday Addiction

Family togetherness is a main theme of the holiday season. Starting with thanksgiving feasts where families go around the table and say what they're grateful for, all the way to ringing in the New Year with a midnight kiss—the traditions are endless and the memories are timeless.



Unfortunately for families struggling with addiction the “family togetherness” of the season is overshadowed with anger and fear.

Addiction tears deep into the fabric of family dynamics. While the addict is severely abusing their own health and lifestyle, they often carry over the consequences of their addiction onto their loved ones.

### **What can we do to help?**

While it might seem like the best idea to shower your addicted family member with love and support during the holiday season, it may be the perfect opportunity for them to seek drug rehab. **Really?**

Yes. We know the holiday season is all about family togetherness, but the only way for an individual struggling with addiction to fully recover from the disease is to seek professional help. And with all the looming stresses of the holiday season, it may be the best time to separate him or her from the environment fueling their addiction.

Going through a drug rehab program during the holiday season will help an addict get through this confusing time and reinstate the healthy and loving connection between family members upon completion.

### **But how can I tell if my loved one really needs treatment?**

More often than not, when you or a loved one is struggling with alcohol and drug addiction the deterioration of physical appearance, change in lifestyle, and outward actions towards friends and family show visible signs of needing professional help.

However, while the visible signs might be enough to know you or your loved one is struggling with addiction, it doesn't necessarily mean it's a walk in the park to admit there is a problem.

## **Denial**

There are two types of denial.

### **Denial type one:**

The first type of denial is when an individual is struggling with alcohol or drug addiction, but refuses to admit they have a problem. While it may be obvious to those surrounding the addict that there is a problem, the addict's mind is clouded by the alcohol or drug abuse. Addiction is then either fooling him or her to believe that the harmful substances haven't taken over their life, or the pleasurable euphoria achieved from alcohol and drug abuse is enough for him or her to deny that it is affecting their life.

### **Denial type two:**

The second type of denial is the type that we will focus on in this chapter; it is when the loved ones of an individual struggling with alcohol and drug addiction refuse to admit that alcohol and drug abuse is destroying the lives of their family member and everyone else in its path.

Type two denial often drives excuse making or self-deception:

- "He doesn't have a drinking problem; he just winds down from the busy day with a few drinks."
- "His drug abuse is only recreational; he could stop whenever he wants."
- "If I give her a place to stay, she'll get better"

This type of denial also has three stages.

**Stage one denial:**

This stage of denial is when the loved ones of an addict fool themselves to believe that his or her loved one isn't struggling with addiction. You recognize that your loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol, but have yet to admit that the abuse is a full-blown addiction in need of professional help.

To overcome this stage of denial is to get educated on your loved ones unique battle with addiction. What substance is he or she abusing? For how long? How is it affecting his or her life? Etc.

Answers to those types of questions are what will help you and your family move toward successful addiction recovery.

**Stage two denial:**

The second stage of denial often occurs after your loved one has sought some sort of addiction treatment. While you and your loved one feel as though you have won the battle, it has really just begun. Addiction is a disease that must continually be monitored. If your loved one exits a treatment program and feels as though they no longer have to take steps to maintain that sobriety, they will surely relapse. As their strongest support system it is imperative for you to also understand that their addiction must be closely monitored and not slip into the second stage of denial.

**Stage three denial:**

This stage of denial occurs if the second stage of denial isn't attended to. The third stage of denial is when you feel as though your loved one has established their recovery enough to no longer work at maintaining it. This is a very dangerous stage to fall victim to, as relapse is knocking on the door and all the hard work at achieving recovery is lingering in the balance. Overcoming this stage of denial requires the realization that recovery takes a life-long commitment. Always remember that addiction is a disease much like diabetes. While individuals can live a long and happy life, he or she must monitor its symptoms.



While denial is commonly associated with the first phase of addiction, individuals often overlook the fact that it can linger throughout the battle. Denial must be confronted head on for your family to reach addiction recovery.

The holiday season particularly threatens the second and third stages of denial. Being aware of the triggers associated with the holiday season and the signs of type two denial will allow you to be your loved ones strongest support system.

### **Is my family member struggling with addiction?**

Unlike the last section of this chapter implies, sometimes you may not know if the signs you are seeing in your loved one is actually a struggle with addiction.

So how can you truly know if your loved one abusing alcohol and drugs?

We like to use the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST). In some cases you will be able to answer the DAST questions for your loved one, but in other cases you may have to approach your family member and have them answer these questions for themselves.

Remember, approaching your loved one about his or her drug abuse problem is never going to be easy, but the family intervention may very well save his or her life. Below you will find the DAST test with scoring instructions:

#### *Directions:*

*The following questions concern information about your involvement with drugs. Drug abuse refers to (1) the use of prescribed or "over-the-counter" drugs in excess of the directions, and (2) any non-medical use of drugs. Consider the past year (12 months) and carefully read each statement. Then write whether your answer is YES or NO in the space provided. Please be sure to answer every question.*

1. Have you used drugs other than those required for medical reasons? \_\_\_\_
2. Have you abused prescription drugs? \_\_\_\_
3. Do you abuse more than one drug at a time? \_\_\_\_
4. Can you get through the week without using drugs (other than those required for medical reasons)? \_\_\_\_
5. Are you always able to stop using drugs when you want to? \_\_\_\_
6. Do you abuse drugs on a continuous basis? \_\_\_\_
7. Do you try to limit your drug use to certain situations? \_\_\_\_
8. Have you had “blackouts” or “flashbacks” as a result of drug use? \_\_\_\_
9. Do you ever feel bad about your drug abuse? \_\_\_\_
10. Does your spouse (or parents) ever complain about your involvement with drugs? \_\_\_\_
11. Do your friends or relatives know or suspect you abuse drugs? \_\_\_\_
12. Has drug abuse ever created problems between you and your spouse? \_\_\_\_
13. Has any family member ever sought help for problems related to your drug use? \_\_\_\_
14. Have you ever lost friends because of your use of drugs? \_\_\_\_
15. Have you ever neglected your family or missed work because of your use of drugs? \_\_\_\_
16. Have you ever been in trouble at work because of drug abuse? \_\_\_\_
17. Have you ever lost a job because of drug abuse? \_\_\_\_
18. Have you gotten into fights when under the influence of drugs? \_\_\_\_
19. Have you ever been arrested because of unusual behavior while under the influence of drugs? \_\_\_\_
20. Have you ever been arrested for driving while under the influence of drugs? \_\_\_\_
21. Have you engaged in illegal activities in order to obtain drug? \_\_\_\_
22. Have you ever been arrested for possession of illegal drugs? \_\_\_\_
23. Have you ever experienced withdrawal symptoms as a result of heavy drug intake? \_\_\_\_
24. Have you had medical problems as a result of your drug use (e.g., memory loss, hepatitis, convulsions, bleeding, etc.)? \_\_\_\_
25. Have you ever gone to anyone for help for a drug problem? \_\_\_\_
26. Have you ever been in a hospital for medical problems related to your drug use? \_\_\_\_
27. Have you ever been involved in a treatment program specifically related to drug use? \_\_\_\_
28. Have you been treated as an outpatient for problems related to drug abuse? \_\_\_\_

### Scoring and interpretation:

A score of "1" is given for each YES response, except for items 4,5, and 7, for which a NO response is given a score of "1." Based on data from a heterogeneous psychiatric patient population, cutoff scores of 6 through 11 are considered to be optimal for screening for substance use disorders. Using a cutoff score of 6 has been found to provide excellent sensitivity for identifying patients with substance use disorders as well as satisfactory specificity (i.e., identification of patients who do not have substance use disorders). Using a cutoff score of <11 somewhat reduces the sensitivity for identifying patients with substance use disorders, but more accurately identifies the patients who do not have a substance use disorders. Over 12 is definitely a substance abuse problem. In a heterogeneous psychiatric patient population, most items have been shown to correlate at least moderately well with the total scale scores. The items that correlate poorly with the total scale scores appear to be items 4,7,16,20, and 22.

If your loved one scores poorly on the DAST test, there is a definite need for family intervention and professional help.

## Family Intervention

Now that you've discovered that your family member is struggling with alcohol and drug addiction, and you yourself have come to terms with the disease, it's time to confront the problem and have your loved one seek professional help.

While an addict has to want to go to drug rehab and achieve addiction recovery, sometimes it takes the extra push from their closest friends and family to make that choice.

### How do I conduct a family intervention?

Family interventions are a challenge in themselves and something we recommend consulting a professional for help in executing a successful intervention.

Following are a few tips to remember when organizing a family intervention:

- Give family members that would like to be involved in the intervention plenty of notice for proper preparation. This gives those individuals enough time gather their thoughts, write letters and become the strongest form of support that the addict will need to take

the step into drug rehab.

- Organize the intervention plans with the entire group. What should everyone bring, prepare or say? There is never enough preparation for an intervention. The more ready you and your group are, the smoother the process will be and the more prepared you'll be if everything doesn't go according to plan.



- Make sure the meeting place for the intervention is inviting, but not too suspicious to the addict. You may have to be vague when inviting your loved one somewhere, but do NOT outright lie to him or her as that will immediately break the addicts trust. Their feeling of initial betrayal may push them to decide not to go into rehab.
- Encourage your group to show love and support in an honest and respectful manner. Maintaining a calm and supportive environment will help alleviate clashing viewpoints.
- Don't try to fix everything yourself. Try working with a professional interventionist or seek personal counseling throughout the process.

## Chapter 3 – Why Should I Go To Drug Rehab Now?

If the holiday season is a time of family togetherness and spreading the season's cheer, why would it be a good time to start a 30-90 day drug rehab program? Wouldn't I miss out on the time of year that could help me recover from addiction on my own?

Not exactly.

Like we've discussed in the previous chapters, while the holiday season has plenty of potential for greetings and cheer, it also carries with it an unforgiving weight—it's a time saturated with financial stress and family strain if faced while struggling with addiction.

So why is it a good idea to embark on your journey to addiction recovery before being confronted with Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah (among other holidays) and ringing in the New Year?

Following are a few reasons start a drug rehab program now instead of later:

### **1. Addiction is often intensified during the holiday season.**

If you or a loved one is flirting with a full-fledged addiction or already struggling with the disease, the holiday season has the potential to intensify its consequences. As mentioned in chapter one, the stress and dreary weather accompanied by the holidays can push an individual into a dangerous realm of alcohol and drug addiction.

The longer your body and mind endure the negative aspects of addiction the worse you may end up; meaning the earlier you start addiction treatment the better chance you have of living a long and happy life of recovery. Otherwise, the extra few days, weeks or months engulfed in alcohol and drug abuse can cause irreparable damage to your life and relationships.

### **2. “The weather outside is frightful”**

Additional to suffering from SAD during the winter months, escaping to warmer climates during unpleasant weather can help facilitate successful addiction recovery. Drug rehab requires a lot of hard work, but going through the process in a more welcoming environment can help ease the process.

Struggle through the holiday season in low temperatures with heavy rain or snowfall, or get healthy and feel better about yourself and your future in 70 degree weather while meditating on the beach or merely enjoying the fresh air. In the end, it's your choice, but we prefer the latter!

### **3. Work and school take a break.**

The holidays are often accompanied by breaks from school and slower business at your job. Your boss may find it easier to relieve you from work to seek professional help during the winter months and if you have kids, the holiday season is a perfect time to spend with relatives



as they will be on vacation from school. Either way, the winter is an opportune time to focus on yourself and getting healthy.

#### **4. Family gatherings during the holidays aren't the same with an addicted loved one**

Even in broken families the holiday season is focused on family togetherness. Unfortunately for families dealing with addiction the “family togetherness” is stripped of its holiday joy and replaced with frustration, anger and confusion. Contrary to many, the “magic of the season” won't make an addiction just disappear, only drug rehab and a commitment to recovery can bring a family closer to the happy and healthy life they once had.

#### **5. Emotions are high around the holidays.**

While the holidays have the potential to increase feelings of happiness and joy, they just as well spark heightened feelings of sadness and depression. People's high expectations of joy during the winter months may bring forward the harsh reality that a specific time of year can't fix all of the family's problems—the exact strain that may accelerate an alcohol and drug addiction. In whole, escaping those harsh realities and taking time to focus on yourself in a safe and structured environment is exactly what you need to begin the road to recovery.

#### **6. The ultimate holiday gift.**

Sobriety! Gift giving is a very big part of the holiday season, and what better gift to give your loved ones than a life of addiction recovery? Addiction is a family disease, so if you achieve recovery this holiday season you are not only taking a great stride in your own life, but you are alleviating the pain and suffering of addiction from your entire family—a selfish and selfless act all in one.

#### **7. A New Year's Resolution.**

Kick off the New Year on the right foot! Make your New Year's Resolution to work hard at your recovery and live a sober lifestyle from here on out. The best way to be successful at that resolution is to embark on your journey before the New Year rings in. Come January 1<sup>st</sup>, you can already have the recovery plan and relapse prevention tools in place to be successful at your new life.

Take the steps today! Start a drug rehab program this holiday season and start the New Year right.

Don't hesitate to call us toll-free at **(866) 205.6531** to answer any questions you may have about addiction and addiction treatment. We are here to help!