

How We Manage the Holidays Now That Our Journey Has Led to Recovery

DECEMBER 13, 2019 BY ALECIA GORDON, PARENT & ADVOCATE

I am very thankful and blessed this holiday season to be sharing it with my son as he continues his journey in recovery. He has been in recovery for three and a half years now and each year he is improving and continuing to choose a sober life. I am proud of the man and the father he has become. I am also proud of the mother I have become.

This has been a gut-wrenching, agonizing journey for 12 years. In the beginning, I would not have believed I would be writing about my son's recovery and how the holiday season is more joyful now than ever. We are grateful for recovery.

In our journey with addiction, I initially thought if I loved my son enough, and if he loved our family enough, he could change his ways. It took a lot of education and time for all of us to learn and understand that he has a disease and that he needed a lot of help to learn to manage his disease. I had to learn that it was out of my control and it would be up to him to do whatever it took to live a life in recovery.

The only control I had was to allow him to live his life whether he continued to use drugs or not. I loved him unconditionally, but had to set boundaries for myself and our family. It was hard! It took a lot of practice and patience and faith that God would help him find his way. We all made mistakes along the way, but always did our best to learn from them.

Our son tried several options for professional treatment. Some court-ordered, some voluntary. He tried in-patient treatment, NA groups, medically assisted outpatient treatment, and sponsors. The last treatment prior to his sustained recovery was six months of inpatient treatment and then six months at a sober living home with

intensive outpatient treatment. I feel that each treatment session taught him something, gave him tools, helped him get stronger, helped him with self-esteem and helped him to gain confidence in his ability to manage his disease.

The holidays are stressful due to our very large extended family and the gatherings that always include alcohol. In the first year in his early recovery, we chose to have our own small gathering with only our immediate family and not have alcohol as part of our celebration. The following year he chose to come to the larger family gathering and brought a friend with him who was also in recovery. He attended several family functions where alcohol was present in this past year. The nice thing is he has friends who come along, and there are other family members who are also in recovery and many others who choose not to drink. We are a very diverse group and most of us are accepting of people on their journey with empathy.

It seems to me that once you are committed to your recovery, you can learn ways to cope and to help others in recovery too. My son was able to think clearly and more logically, and he found that there are many people in our family and circle of friends who are in recovery and also those who just choose not to use substances.

Once your brain has a chance to heal from the substance use, you are able to make a choice of sobriety. You are able to see that there are many others making the same choice. Change is very hard, but many people have changed. It is not easy and it is not something to take lightly. But recovery is definitely something to celebrate!

If you currently have a family member in active addiction, here are a few ways that helped my family get through the holiday season:

- Set an example for your family and take care of yourself first.
- Your feelings are valid! Allow yourself time each day to feel what you are feeling.
- I truly believe that your thoughts, whether negative or positive, will manifest more of the same.
- The only control you have is your own attitude.
- Addiction can be survived.