

PRINT SCRIPT-Breaking the Tradition of Holiday Gatherings

For some families, the holidays are the only time of the year they see extended family, so the idea of skipping the trip this year can be a hard decision and it can make for a difficult conversation.

OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health Director Luke Raymond says the best approach is to be direct.

“Be straightforward, honest and to the point. When you waffle and go back and forth, you create this sense that you may be convinced to change your mind,” he advised. “So initially, setting a firm boundary and explaining that it’s about safety and protecting everyone, not about disappointing them or hurting their feelings. That can go a long way.”

Raymond also suggests re-framing the conversation in a way to remind family that this is a temporary situation, and that you plan to return to the family tradition as soon as it is safe. Making future plans is also helpful.

“Let’s plan on having one heck of a celebration for Independence Day or Memorial Day and there’s nothing that says we can’t shift the calendar a little bit to have these meaningful traditional get-togethers. Why can’t we have a Thanksgiving celebration in June?” he suggested.

Holiday traditions are often the glue which keeps families, especially older extended family, feeling connected.

Raymond says it’s important to recognize the connection between COVID-19 and loss.

“It’s about grieving the loss of normal. It’s about grieving the loss of life we’ve had, grieving the loss of these meaningful events and connection with other people. So if we do turn it into this idea of focusing on something in the future, that can be incredibly powerful and helpful in breaking the news that we’re not going to get together for these holidays,” according to Raymond.

Another positive approach might be to start a new holiday tradition. Raymond says some people might have what he calls ‘Zoom fatigue,’ but he says there are fun ways to keep virtually connected through a new activity.

“Maybe we can cook a family recipe together at the same time. Maybe we can sing a Christmas carol and if we have a teenager who’s gifted at splicing together videos, we can have a chorus of that same song that we all had that gives us a sense of being together.”

Lastly, Raymond recommends another new tradition.

He suggests helping those who are battling stress, fatigue and possibly time away from their immediate family during the holiday.

“What a great opportunity to share our appreciation for them and in turn, make ourselves feel good about doing something for people who deserve it, then to send some care packages to an ICU or to send some thank you’s to people who really deserve it at this time.”

If you are struggling with stress, anxiety or depression right now and it is not an emergency, you can reach out to an OSF Behavioral Health navigator by calling (309) 308-8150. They can direct you to the right resource for what you’re experiencing. [OSF SilverCloud](#) is a no-cost online resource available 24/7.