

## December Senior Sense: A Very COVID Christmas and Other Holiday Concerns

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If you're like me, you cannot wait to see 2020 come to a close. So much stress. So much loss. So much uncertainty. However, before we can enter 2021, we have to cross through "the holidays." Although they are billed as "the most wonderful time of the year," the winter holidays, from Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve, can be anything but for caregivers. And throw in a highly contagious and often deadly virus, and the 2020 holiday season is a mix of holiday cheer with a bit of dread and a lot of emotion mixed in. What's a caregiver to do?

Here's how I'm navigating this holiday season: stop, strategize, and start over.

**Stop.** The first thing we all need to do as we head into the end of the year, is pause. Take a deep breath. Then take another one. Seriously caregivers, we need to slow down. We've spent months worrying and waiting and wondering if we could see the people we care for or if we should stay away. We hoped we'd have more clarity by now and looser restrictions, but that's not the case. So before we head into the next phase, planning a holiday get together, let's just stop and get our bearings. This holiday season doesn't need to look perfect – it won't be perfect – so let's not exhaust ourselves trying to achieve the impossible.

**Strategize.** Okay, now that we've given ourselves some head space to think clearly, it's time to make a safety plan. Before we can even consider what this holiday season should look like, we need to consider health and safety. First, assess the risk of spending the holidays together. Factors that increase risk are community spread – not just in the area where you will gather, but in the communities where any of your prospective guests live. Next, consider underlying health risks for attendees. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has released [updated guidelines](#) on holiday celebrations and small gatherings. Next, we want to think about how we will gather. Will it be inside or out? Can we maintain 6 feet of distance? Can we include the usual guest list or do we need to break into small groups? Finally, we need to decide what is more valuable - safety or togetherness? Know that there is no right answer – as long as we all do our part to control risk and spread of the coronavirus. Only you and your family members can decide.

**Start Over.** And finally, the third step I'm taking this holiday season, is to start over. For 20 years, I have hosted my extended family on Christmas night. It's actually a party that started 70 years before I inherited it. But this year, it just can't happen – at least not with 50 people inside gathered around the kitchen island and dining room table for several hours. So I am starting from scratch. I will think about what the holidays mean to our family – tradition, food, family, laughter, and I will find a way to honor those values - somehow. It's sad to halt a long standing tradition but it's won't be forever. So this year, accept that it will feel different. The holiday season won't feel like all of the others. If you don't expect it to, it won't be as jarring. You may feel sad. You may feel empty. You may feel lighter. You may have a great day. You will most likely feel different. All of those options are okay and perfectly normal.

Give yourself permission to start new traditions and skip traditions that won't work. Grieve for what you're missing, but try to stay open to what's possible. One year off doesn't have to mean forever. If we need to take a break from a tradition, we can pick up again the next year – if we want to. But this year, let's take it slow, stay safe, and honor our feelings. Who knows, we may find a new tradition we like even better!

Liz O'Donnell is the founder of [Working Daughter](#) and the author of [Working Daughter: A Guide To Caring For your Aging Parents While Making A Living](#). For caregiving support, information and resources contact a Senior Care Advisor at Care.com. We are master's-level social workers specializing in adult and senior care. Call us today at (855) 781-1303 x3 or email questions to [careplanning@care.com](mailto:careplanning@care.com)

