A Holiday COVID Compromise
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Hopefully, those of you reading this made it through your Thanksgiving Holiday relatively unscathed. In all reality, however, a lot of families faced conflict over whether or not it was a good idea to join together as a family or not. If 2020 has taught us anything, it’s been how to access our resiliency, and persevere through stressors we never thought we would need to navigate. And it’s likely that the remainder of the 2020 holiday season will not be an exception. If you are feeling unsatisfied with how you and your families navigated Thanksgiving, and/or you’re feeling the need to now focus on the remaining holidays of the year, consider the following:

1. **First, figure out your own core needs about the holidays.** Perhaps it’s that everyone is physically safe, or that no one is alone. Maybe it’s a need for peace within your home, or some semblance of normalcy. Regardless of what direction your brain takes you, fill in the following blank for yourself: “If ________ happens/doesn’t happen, I don’t feel like I can feel right/satisfied about the holidays.” Try to stick to one or two core needs with regard to the holidays.

2. **Share that core need, and why it is so important to you, with your partner/family.** Take this on as your own area of need, without commenting on or criticizing others’ perspectives. Make sure that the person you are sharing this need with is understanding you and that you feel understood; ask them to reflect their understanding back to you if you need.

3. **Now allow your partner or family member to do the same.** Now is your turn to listen. What is/are their core need(s)? Why are they so important to them? Reflect back your understanding to them, and find something that makes sense to you. You are likely attempting to compromise over different areas of prioritization rather than attempting to understand values that don’t make any sense at all. If you prioritize no family member being alone for the holidays, you are still likely able to access a part of you that can understand and validate why someone would be gravely concerned about everyone’s safety. Find that part of yourself, and let that your partner/family member know that their perspective has merit, even if you disagree.

4. **Consider the timing of your conversation.** Don’t trap a partner or family member in the car and force them to talk to you about this topic. Rather, let them know that this is something important for you to discuss, and that you want to set a concrete date and time for you all to do so. Allow space for the fact that it might not be right in that moment.
   a. **Also consider reversing #’s 2 and 3 above.** Sometimes, we as human beings are just more likely to listen if we feel heard first. You may need/want to model the type of conversation you want to have with them before you begin sharing your perspective. There’s no right or wrong to how you structure that time beyond making sure that there is space for two equally valid, albeit differing, perspectives.

5. **Take all of those core needs and lay them out on the proverbial table – now come up with solutions together that meets each of those needs.** This is the time to get creative. Think of
this step in compromising as collaborative rather than combative. You both are trying to find options that can meet the needs you each have. Consider where you can be flexible and give your partner the opportunity to do the same.

Once you have had the conversation and you have made a decision about what you plan to do, now it’s time to communicate that to the larger crowd of those you call family. Let’s talk about how to make this happen:

1. **Manage your own anxiety.** Changing a shared family ritual that has perhaps extended across generations is not easy to suggest, pandemic or not. But keep in mind that it is more of a rarity for families to be torn apart by a COVID-cautious spouse. They may not like the decision you have established, and that is okay. Remember that this is not likely to cause permanent damage to the relationship.

2. **Remind yourself of why you have made the decision you have made.** You just did a whole lot of hard work in the conversation above. Do what you need to do to remind yourself of why you came to the decision you did and remind yourself of the value in that reason. Talking about a difficult subject with anyone you care about is a lot easier when you believe in it — don’t try to inform your family of your plans if you are resentful and angry and not supporting the underpinnings of that decision.

3. **When you inform others, communicate your love for them and concern for their safety above all else.** Chances are, the reason that you choose what you do is because you love your family and friends dearly. No matter what you do for the upcoming holidays, make sure that you take the opportunity to communicate this first.

4. **Find alternative ways to maintain a connection with those you love.** The holidays are a time that we spend with our loved ones and share our affections through many acts (not the least of which is giving gifts, but also includes engaging in cherished traditions, spending quality time together, and so many more). That is what makes COVID so difficult — those things that make us feel connected are not accessible, and the alternatives do not make us feel as close. There is no better way to say this — it is what it is, and you do not have control over it. I am so sorry, and I do not like it either. This does not mean that COVID and connection are mutually exclusive. It means we must adapt, which is exactly what you are doing. We have all learned how to use Zoom, we’re finding other ways to connect through live streaming, and it’s because we are inherently a really creative and resilient species. It really stinks that we have to, but don’t sacrifice connection — find a way to adapt to a level that is at least somewhat satiating and communicates the care that you feel to the best of your ability.

In a world that is wrought with means by which we can become divided, I find that the holidays are often a time that we look forward to as a time of healing, connection, and togetherness (not for everyone, of course, but I do find it is a large part of the appeal). Perhaps it is because I am doe’y-eyed and naïve (which I fully admit), but I believe that this is still true. I have seen families take on some of the most intense challenges and strife that I have ever seen. I have observed individuals devastated from so many directions, and they are still standing. We are nothing if not resilient. Although we can recognize that COVID really.... [insert expletive here] ..., I also recognize that I have seen an insurmountable level of strength, fortitude, and perseverance. I have every confidence that you can do the same, and that these conversations, although hard (and the implications of such potentially disappointing beyond measure), are manageable. We will get through the holidays, and even though it will likely be through an altered format, we will do it together.
... and for those of you who, like me, also cope with dark humor, we will also hope that 2021 will not be the same level of dumpster-fire that 2020 has been...

May your holidays be merry, and at least not as dim as we worry they will be.