

## 2022 Holiday Guide

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” This quote is from Charles Dickens’ novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* but it could easily be describing a holiday event. In the interest of steering everyone towards the “best” of times, Community Building Initiative is happy to offer this brief Holiday Guide. Whether it’s advice on navigating tough conversations, or just maximizing your joy while preserving your self-worth - we hope you find it helpful. We at CBI wish you the happiest of holidays!

- 1. SET SOME GROUND RULES AHEAD OF TIME** - The holidays bring people together. Go ahead and acknowledge that these people will have differing viewpoints, and come up with a plan that allows everyone to enjoy the holidays TOGETHER. Possibilities could involve seating arrangements, postponing political or other volatile conversations until after dinner, leaving some topics off-limits, or whatever makes the most sense for your get-together. Set these boundaries ahead of time and hold each other accountable for honoring them.
- 2. PRIORITIZE JOY** - We tend to find what we seek. If you approach the holidays looking for division, then that is surely what you will find. Give yourself permission to enjoy the holidays, and prioritize connections and commonality. You can disagree with someone and still feel a connection if you understand them, their life, what challenges they have faced that led them to believe what they believe, and why that person is important to you.
- 3. DON'T SHY AWAY FROM HARD CONVERSATIONS** - Nothing ventured means nothing gained. If a topic comes up that you would like to discuss, don't be afraid to have that discussion. But approach hard conversations with an intent to understand - not just to make a point, win an argument, or change someone's mind.
- 4. USE DIALECTICS** - Dialectic Thinking embraces an understanding that two things that seem opposite can be true at the same time. Different viewpoints can both be valid. Speak only in first person terms (“I believe” or “I feel”) rather than in universal or absolute terms. Allow yourself to consider that someone else may have a different point of view based on their experiences. Embrace ambiguity and decide ahead of time that you can be okay if no single viewpoint or solution proves to be “correct.”



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- 5. USE STORIES TO ILLUSTRATE YOUR POINT** - Stories allow us to see life from a different point of view. Lean into personal anecdotes in conversations. Telling someone a story about how you or a loved one were impacted by something is much more effective than simply stating an opinion.
- 6. STAY FOCUSED AND AVOID PERSONAL ATTACKS** - It is one thing to point out a factual mistake (“I read a recent article that found that...”). It is another to attack the person making the case (“Well, that’s just stupid if you believe that...”). Ensure any conversation you are having is on-topic, as well as not attacking the person with whom you are conversing. Recognize when this is happening and either de-escalate or exit the conversation immediately.
- 7. DON'T INTERNALIZE** - Remember that if someone disagrees with you, it does not change your worth or the value of the things you believe. Allow someone to hold a different opinion from yours without it diminishing your self-esteem.
- 8. HAVE AN EXIT STRATEGY** - As much as you may want to engage, sometimes for your own well-being it’s best to move on. Have some ideas in mind that you can implement if the conversation becomes too much. Something as simple as “Clearly we both have strong opinions regarding this, and I appreciate you sharing your views. In the interest of maximizing our enjoyable time together - let’s talk about something else.”
- 9. FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE** - If you are freely choosing to spend time with people, then you probably value them on some level. The goal most of us are striving for is to create happy memories with the people who are important in our lives. Even if no minds are changed, healthy bonds should remain intact at the end of the day.
- 10. SCHEDULE TIME FOR YOURSELF AFTER A STRESSFUL EVENT** - If you know an event will be stressful or drain your personal reserves, have something to look forward to afterward. Whatever that looks like for you - time alone or time with your pets or time with a favorite loved one. Knowing something good is in store can help you get through more challenging times.