

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF FOR THE HOLIDAYS

by Judith Morton Fraser

Holidays are an easy time to lose your sense of what feels right to you and move into the “shoulds”. For example: Everyone else is shopping, I should too. Everyone else is visiting friends and neighbors, I should too. Everyone else seems to know what to do, I should to.

The shouldn'ts, the can'ts, the nevers, the dancing doubts may all roar in doing a soft shoe, or they might take turns giving each other time for solos.

It's also a time when feeling you're the only one doing it wrong might come up. Example: Everyone else has a totally loving and caring family, what's wrong with me? Mary knows what she's doing and where she's going, what's wrong with me?

And of course the shouldn'ts, the can'ts, the nevers, the dancing doubts may all roar in doing a soft shoe, or they might take turns giving each other time for solos.

The first part of taking care of yourself for the Holidays is to stop and take time for yourself. This is a time for love. Love begins right where you are. How can you be loving with yourself? That might be: putting on music and dancing alone, joining a group to sing Carols in the neighborhood, creating a special dinner or other event with a friend or asking a friend if you can join her/him in what they're doing, visiting a children's hospital and reading stories, taking time to visit your favorite place, walking in the park, watching the sun rise or set, writing in a journal to examine your strengths and weaknesses, reconnecting to a person or family in your past that meant something positive to you, writing to others and giving them the gift of acknowledgment you had hoped they would give to you, etc. You get the idea. It's taking time to use the end of the year ceremoniously but in a way that supports you in where you are right now in your growth.

Create gifts for yourself, as: The first day of a Holiday I'll take a long hot bubble bath at 9:00 p.m., the second day I'll write myself a love poem, the third day I'll reach out to someone else, the fourth day I'll try something new that I've always wanted to do, the fifth day I'll write these down ahead of time. Use your day-by-day book or computer calendar and actually schedule these gifts.

It's easier to be loving with others once you learn how to be loving with yourself. However it's also good to prepare for what may lie ahead. Don't expect family members or friends to be different than they have been in the past. Do expect yourself to know what their positives and negatives have been in the past (at least some of them). How can you take care of yourself better? If Aunt Maude talks all the time about herself and you feel stuck — how can you get unstuck or how can you bring the conversation to a place that feels better for you? If Uncle Joe is always giving you solutions to your problems without your asking for advice then gently let him know that you just want to be heard. If neighbor Josephine tries to make you feel differently than you do in the moment with statements like “just look at the bright side of life, don't

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be such a downer, you're too hard on yourself" gently let her know that you would rather have your feelings accepted for what they are. Remember that most of the time others speak for themselves. They may think they are being helpful and sometimes they are. Other times, when they are not helpful remember that generally their conversation reveals more about them than it does about you. The only way it can really be about you is if you are the one talking about what's going on with you.

If you notice yourself trying to take care of someone else during a conversation and you know that's a pattern with you then try not to say anything and just listen and if that doesn't work you can always go get a drink of water. If it's difficult for you to think of what to say in a group situation then think about what you might like others to say to you and role play that in your mind or in front of a mirror. If you always end up doing all of the work for dinner or a party, then reach out for others to help. Others generally like to be included it makes them feel better and frees some valuable time for you, and if those around you don't want to help then it might be a good idea to stop and evaluate why you've chosen friends who aren't willing to help.

Practice some assertive skills ahead of time. I often write notes to myself as reminders of how to deal with new problems in my life. You might want to develop a specific plan for a specific situation. If so you might try the following:

Write down the situation clearly.

Write down what you want to accomplish.

Write down what you want to happen and how you want to behave.

Be aware of the personal rights at issue for yourself and the others involved.

Write down the dialogue you would ideally have and challenge any of your self defeating or inaccurate thoughts. Also question any of your assumptions, "if I say this he'll say or feel _____ and then I'll really be _____."

When you've tried new behavior write down how close you came to meeting your original intention of what you wanted to accomplish.

Acknowledge what you did.

Examine how you might change your original plan to make it easier for yourself.

Problems Are Fertile Soil For New Growth

Taking responsibility for yourself is empowering. It leads to self trust and that translates into loving yourself for the miracle you are.

Take time to listen to your feelings.

How do you feel right now? Angry, sad, frustrated, confused, etc.?

Where do you feel that in your body? It could be tension or pain in your chest, abdomen, stomach, etc .

Can you allow yourself to be compassionate with these feelings?

Create a dialogue between the conscious aware you and what you're experiencing in your body.

Repeat the experience back to yourself. Create an echo if you're doing this in your mind. Write it down if you're using a journal book.

Acknowledge yourself for the time you've taken to build a bridge between the conscious mind and the feelings in your body. This strengthens your intuition and allows a dialogue between you and your Inner Wisdom.

