

Abuse Excuses not Allowed this Holiday Season

We are in the middle of the holidays and for many of you that means being in the middle of the roller coaster of abuse intensified by the season's stresses. Wouldn't it be nice not to feel stuck with a scrooge this year? Or a holiday Nazi? Wouldn't it be nice not to be in a defensive mode around the clock and hoping that your partner's good mood lasts just a little longer. Nice to know that you won't have to cancel plans at the last minute because your partner gets a hard on for someone or something—most likely you? Wouldn't it be nice to get through a holiday season without the accusations, guilt, or silent treatment?



It baffles the police that from Thanksgiving through New Years the calls to the hotlines for help decrease but actual calls to the police about domestic violence increase. (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence www.nrcdv.org) It doesn't surprise me because I now how we “victims” think. If we can just be good enough, show him how much the holidays means, don't make waves, don't make him mad so Christmas is ruined...” If we can just earn his love this holiday season and try really really really hard---then maybe it'll be different this year. So we don't call for help until its escalated beyond tolerable.

Yet this is our fantasy—if we can control our environment, him, our feelings—we'll *force* this to be a good holiday. It's just that it never is, is it? That is because when we try to make it good for him, we end up rewarding their bad behavior, and then we get more of it. So this holiday season try to do this differently. Don't try to make it good for him or for them. No more excuses to yourself about why you have to take the abuse this year. No more accepting excuses for their bad behavior—or worse, you making excuses to others for their bad behavior! (*These suggestions are for verbal and emotional abuse only. If your partner is violent in any way, do not follow these suggestions and seek professional help for the holidays. Violence is unacceptable in any form and standing up for yourself with a violent person can get you hurt.*)

Six Ways to Make this the Holiday of No More Abuse Excuses

1. Your gift to your partner is to *not allow* them to abuse you. Focus on *your* self-respect program and not how to *change them*. Review your Respect-Me Rules so that you know what you are willing to accept from your partner and what you are not willing to accept. Just because it's the holidays is no reason to allow them to mistreat you.

2. Strengthen your support system. Make sure your support system is in place—know how to get a hold of your therapist, sponsor, spiritual advisor, and your personal support (the person who will come get you if you need to make a quick exit). Put your support person on your speed dial on your cell. If you don't have a cell, make sure a neighbor knows your situation and have your support numbers at *their* house, so you can escape and call at any time. Create a plan on where you go when they get abusive. Whether you leave for an hour or a day or until New Years—know ahead of time what the plan is and follow it.

3. Pets as gifts. Do not allow animals as a gift from your partner or from other family members. Abusive partners often abuse pets as a way to control their partner. Don't even allow this temptation if your partner is still abusive with you and the kids—additional pets will only make it harder for you to step away when you need to.

4. When abuse begins: When your partner begins to call you names, get unreasonable, or makes stupid accusations, do not defend yourself, cry, or accuse them of anything. Review your boundary setting techniques and tell them clearly and calmly that you don't appreciate what they are doing and won't be around them if they continue. I give you permission to tell the truth and only be around people who respect you. Give yourself permission to speak up for yourself. If you had plans to be somewhere for celebrations and he or she cancels at the last minute, *go by yourself* (or yourself and the kids). When people ask why he's not there, **DO NOT COVER FOR HIM**. Tell the truth or tell them to ask him.

5. Don't worry about how things should be when enforcing the rules: You may have to challenge some of your assumptions about how the holidays play out when you speak up for yourself and enforce your respect-me rules. What if you don't spend Christmas morning with your partner? What if you didn't cook dinner for him and the kids? What if you took the kids to McDonald's for Christmas dinner? Is that a disaster? A horrible thing? Well, ask yourself—is it worse than a screaming match with your partner? Maybe it's the start of a new tradition—or possibly you will remember it in the years ahead with laughter and glee, “Remember the time when...” sort of thing. It's not such a big deal. What is a big deal is you allowing yourself and your kids to have a holiday ruined because your partner wants to make you his or her scapegoat. Be conscious of what you are doing and why. If the old patterns leave you being abused, then it's time to change the pattern and change your mind about how to celebrate the holidays.

6. Have realistic expectations. If your partner routinely ruins every special day (as abusers often do), do not fool yourself that this year will be different. Your plan to not allow abuse should be stronger at this time of the year. It is not “better” to let it go and endure for the sake of the kids—or whatever excuse you give for accepting abuse. You can't force him or her to behave properly. You can't shame them into acting like a loving spouse. If you are realistic, you will assume that this year is likely to be like last year but the difference this time is your response—they can behave anyway they like, that is between them and their Higher Power. You on the other hand will only allow them to treat you well, and if they want to be a shit, they will have to be that with other people because you won't hang around.

Conclusion

Don't be the person who is always trying to fix them and please them. It doesn't work and you know it. Instead, seek to allow only those things that represent what you love about this season. Be with people who love you and treat you well. Everything is not perfect. But there are people who do value you—be with them. Don't allow yourself to make one more excuse for accepting abuse. The way you enjoy this holiday is truly up to you.