

Abstinent Holidays

As a Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW sponsor, you may have sponsees who get very nervous about maintaining their abstinence during the holidays, especially if they're entering into their first abstinent holiday season.

As their sponsor, you can help keep things in perspective. You can remind your sponsees that we do this program one day at a time and let them know every holiday is just another day. For example, Thanksgiving is just Thursday and Easter is just Sunday. You can also remind them that we are compulsive eaters who don't need reasons to eat. We eat compulsively when we're happy or sad, stressed out or relaxed, angry or serene. Our solution is to work the Twelve Steps and Seven Tools of the CEA-HOW program every day, including holidays.

Because the holidays present special challenges, along with the specific experience, strength and hope you can offer, here are some tips that you can pass on to your sponsees to help them create a joyful, stress-free, abstinent holiday season.

Be Prepared.

During the holidays, schedules get busier, stress levels are higher, and social obligations are greater. This means that whether your sponsees are traveling, attending potlucks and parties, or entertaining at home, they will need to take extra precaution to protect their abstinence. You may need to remind them to make sure to plan ahead for each specific event to make sure they can stick to their programs.

As it says on page 12 of the *Forever Abstinent* gray booklet, "Do not depend on others to maintain your abstinence—you must empower yourself." This means that sponsees need to take responsibility for their own programs. You can remind them that if they don't take care of themselves, nobody will.

Take Extra Action.

The stressors of the season can make us vulnerable to compulsive eating, which means we may need to work our programs even harder. You can suggest to your sponsees that, along with working all of CEA-HOW's Seven Tools every day, they may need to take extra action during the holidays.

You can remind sponsees that they may need to attend more than three live or phone bridge meetings per week, make more than four phone calls per day, perform more service work, do more writing, and read more CEA-HOW literature. You may also want to suggest they invest more time in prayer and meditation to help them stay centered during the day.

Taking extra action during the holidays will help sponsees stay grounded in the recovery, less prone to emotional upheavals, and less vulnerable to slips.

Travel Smart.

If your sponsees are traveling, you can set up a schedule where they can still commit their food to you on a daily basis. If you aren't available, adhere to page three of the *Sponsor Guidelines* book, which says when "...a sponsor will be out of town or not available, it is the sponsor's obligation to arrange for a temporary sponsor for the sponsee to call."

Make sure to remind them to go to the CEA-HOW website, www.ceahow.org, before they travel to find CEA-HOW meetings in the areas they are visiting and to take advantage of phone bridge meetings. You can also remind them to pack their scales, measuring cups and spoons along with CEA-HOW literature such as the *Forever Abstinent* gray booklet and maintenance plan if they are on maintenance.

If your sponsees are flying, you can let them know that they can carry abstinent food with them on the plane. Some airlines also have their menus available on their websites if your sponsees want to check. If your sponsees are staying in hotels, they can call the front desk ahead of time to see if the hotel either has or can provide small refrigerators.

Focus on the People, Not the Food.

The holidays are the time of year when we get to spend time with loved ones. Being stressed out about the food puts a damper on the holiday spirit and distracts us from being fully present to the people we might not get to see as often as we'd like. With some planning and pro-active action, however, you can let your sponsees know that they can relax and enjoy the company of their loved ones rather than worry about the food.

As it says on page 11 of the *Forever Abstinent* gray booklet, "Be prepared! Call ahead to restaurants, conferences, and friends to make sure they're serving food that's on your plan. Explaining your nutritional needs in advance helps to avoid conflicts later."

If your sponsees are going to holiday parties, suggest they call the host ahead of time to see what is being served. Often hosts are happy to provide special dishes for guests. Your sponsees can also offer to bring an abstinent dish for everyone to share.

If your sponsees are staying with friends or relatives, they can call ahead and let their hosts know of their needs and even take a trip to the grocery store to stock up on abstinent food once they arrive.

If your sponsees are entertaining at home and are serving non-abstinent food, suggest they have aluminum foil, baggies, and containers available so guests can take home leftovers with them.

Set Healthy Boundaries.

The holidays are a busy time but we must put our abstinence first—no matter what. This means we may have to say no to some holiday activities if it will put our programs in jeopardy. Remind your sponsees that running themselves ragged in the name of holiday fun will do neither them nor their families any good. You can help them learn that taking care of themselves means saying no when saying yes is not in their best interests.

Both you and your sponsees can enjoy the holidays and remain abstinent. We do the holidays like we do anything else—one meal and one day at a time.

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