



TREbit# Holiday Traditions Hold Power

The brain (limbic system) constantly seeks things that are familiar and predictable to regulate and subsequently release hormones that promote happiness and pleasure. Traditions and rituals associated with holidays hold great power in activating our brain! These are just a few of the traditions (family & nonfamily rituals) associated with December holidays that offer familiarity and predictability:

- * *Holiday music that we hear every year (music has healing qualities beyond tradition)*
- * *Ceremonies and activities such as the lighting of Christmas trees or lighting the menorah candles*
- * *Connecting through the exchange of holiday cards.*
- * *Gatherings and parties with family, friends, or co-workers (we know the power of genuine connections!)*
- * *Food associated with the holiday*
- * *Stimulation of senses associated with holidays, such as the aroma of pine or cinnamon, lights, and images of snow.*
- * *The retelling of stories and watching movies that focus on the meaning of the holiday.*
- * *The act of giving*
- * *Anticipation of good times*



However, our self-care and care for others includes awareness and identifying ways in which traditions can cause pain or can be triggers, such as trauma experienced during previous holiday traditions or trauma associated with sights, sounds, and smells, or even the time of year of the tradition. Traditions amplify disruptions to the familiar and predictable in our life, such as the loss of a loved one, moving to a

Reminder: we don't have to continue holiday traditions that leave us broke, overwhelmed and tired.

new location, any other disruption in our traditions or holding expectations that exceed reality. Societal holiday traditions can even be micro aggressions due to not having the same cultural, spiritual, or personal participation in the traditions.

We can take steps to counteract these triggers associated traditions:

- * *Create new, meaningful, and enjoyable traditions.*
- * *Identify and have a strong genuine network with in-person gatherings.*
- * *Keep expectations realistic.*
- * *Use a Personal Safety Plan to address potential toxic stress.*



Lastly, according to three [studies conducted on the impact of family rituals](#), **two combined factors maximize a person's holiday enjoyment; 1. Being together with family (given or chosen) + 2. Engaging in traditions with the family.**

For more information and tools, check out Dr. Bruce Perry's work on the use of rituals to regulate, the neurosequential processing system of the brain and the need for strong meaningful connections for resilience and/or check out the following articles: "[Why Making Time for Holiday Traditions \(and Splurges\) Is Self-Care, Too](#)", "[3 Ways Holiday Traditions Can Improve Mental Health](#)", "[Psychological Benefits of Holidays and Special Occasions](#)", "[Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping](#)", "[Coping with grief during the holidays after the death of a loved one](#)".