

The Holiday No Win Situation and How to Deal With It **By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

A double bind is one of those experiences that everyone has had at one time or another. It is the classic "Damned if you; damned if you don't" experience. It is the "no-win" situation. Some families have double bind situations built into the structure and functioning of the system. It is standard operating procedure for various family members in their interactions with others in the family. What it creates, of course, is elevated stress/anxiety, relationship tension, low self-esteem, resentment, guilt, shame, and all other manner of emotional/psychological pestilence. It is so damaging that some psychologists once believed that it caused schizophrenia.

Family dynamics around the holidays often puts individuals and couples in double bind situations. An example might be the relative who typically hosts the holidays gatherings at her house, then complains about being "taken for granted", "taken advantage of", or not having an appropriate amount of help. When another family member steps in and insists that someone else host the family get together, the Complainer feels hurt, threatened, and rejected, and complains even louder.

Sometimes buying Christmas presents is a double bind situation. When you are worrying more about whether you spent the same amount of money on all the cousins, or on your children individually, than whether you are giving them something that is personally meaningful to him/her, you may be double binding yourself. There are other ways to get into double binds with Christmas buying, including feeling badly about spending too much money or using credit cards vs. feeling badly about not giving your loved ones things you know that they want.

Double binds are only one source of holiday stress, but they can be a big source of fret and worry. How to get out of double binds? Don't play. Make a decision based on what you want to do, then let go of it. Are the people who love you going to love you less? Probably not. When you keep trying to figure out a way to win in a "no win" situation, you lose even bigger. Give up. Stop trying. Make it easier on yourself. Do what you want to do, and accept that you are probably not going to be rewarded for your decision. But then again, if you decided the other way, you wouldn't be rewarded for that decision either. Let other people be responsible for their own feelings and behavior. Not every thing is about you.



This helpful guide for managing holiday stress covers reasons why we experience extra stress during the holidays, how stress can impact addiction recovery, and makes suggestions not only on how to survive holiday stress, but how to move from anxiety and stress into effective problem solving. It Includes worksheets.

Although written with the recovering person in mind, it provides helpful information to anyone experiencing "holiday stress".

[PDF file. \\$7.95](#)

Copyright 2012 Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D., Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK 74074