

A Body-Positive Holiday Worksheet

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The Holiday Season can be a challenging time when it comes to feeling positive about our body. I believe this is because, for many of us, **our relationship with our bodies is tied up in our relationship with food.** And if food causes us stress, how we feel in our body is affected. And vice versa.

As a time of feasting and family, food is definitely a big part of the Holidays. We are surrounded by delicious food that we are supposed to both enjoy *and* resist. All while juggling the stresses of holiday shopping, time commitments and, for many, challenging family dynamics.

What is Body Positivity?

Being **body positive** signifies many things and can be different from person to person. Let's think about it here as being **kinder to ourselves, tuning into and appreciating our bodies, being in the moment and responding to our needs.**

What kind of challenges do you typically face in feeling good about your body over the Holidays?

To support you in navigating the Holiday Season in a more body-positive way, I have gathered some tips or opportunities for you to try, both with the landmines around food and with other holiday stressors that can impact how we are feeling in our body. Let's start with food:

* Invite yourself to bring **non-judgemental mindfulness** to your eating experience over the holidays. Eating with mindfulness is, of course helpful all year, but especially during the holidays it can really help to tune in and pay attention to when you are hungry and when you are full and do your best to respond. Also it is important to take the time to determine what sorts of foods you are really in the mood for (hot? cold? crunchy? savoury? sweet?). Finally, give yourself permission to **slow down and really enjoy the food you are eating**.

* **Eating regularly** keeps your blood sugar level and can head off hunger-induced mood swings. If you are tempted to skip a meal to 'make room' for a holiday meal, you put yourself at risk for getting so ravenous that you inadvertently overeat.

* **Challenge yourself to not think of food as 'good' or 'bad'**. In my experience thinking of food in this way tends to cause us to obsess over the foods we've decided to think of as 'bad' and have banned from our diet. At times of stress, like the holidays, we are more likely to rebel against our self imposed rules and again inadvertently eat past fullness. When we move away from this 'black and white' thinking about food and give ourselves permission to eat what we want (without judgement) while taking the time to pause to eat with mindfulness, we are much more likely to eat in a way that supports our health and wellbeing.

What strategies for eating during the holidays have you employed in the past? Have they been helpful?

Are there any foods on your "Bad" List? What fears do you have around letting go of thinking of food as 'good' or 'bad'?

- * **Avoid Fat Talk:** Engaging in Fat Talk does not support a positive relationship with our body. Unfortunately holiday gatherings tend to be rife with Fat Talk, as all of our friends, family and coworkers are all feeling the body anxiety that the holiday season brings, just as we are. To avoid getting caught in the trap of Fat Talk, it is helpful to have some responses in your back pocket. Plan ahead what you will say when your cousin brings up her latest diet, or one of your coworkers starts complaining about her 'thunder thighs'. When someone is trying to engage me in body commentary or diet talk, I like to say something like, *"You know, I've noticed that since I started to focus more on listening to my body than on my weight, I've felt a lot healthier and happier,"* and then move on to a different subject. If a friend announces he will only be eating turkey because he is on a low-carb diet, be ready to ask about his plans for New Year's Eve, for example. Thinking about these "outs" ahead of time helps us not to freeze up, or worse, get sucked into a body-negative discussion.

Fat Talk is....

Conversations that happen in your social circles that include **discussing our bodies in a negative way.**

These can be comments or criticisms about parts of your body or your body as a whole. Fat talk can also involve comments about wanting to change your body through diet and exercise. Once you start paying attention to Fat Talk, you will be surprised at how often it is present in our day to day life. Finding ways to not engage in it is a big step forward in living a body positive life.

**Where have you encountered Fat Talk during the Holiday Season in the past?
When do think you may encounter it this year?**

What responses might work for you if you find yourself confronted with Fat Talk?

- * **Allow yourself all your feelings.** Sometimes the Holidays can be a stressful and unhappy time. It is important to know it is okay to have sad or 'not happy' feelings over the holidays. I invite you to pay attention to what you are feeling and be intentional about taking care of your needs. Practice self compassion and look for ways to care for yourself. Look at yourself with *soft eyes* and think of things you might say to or do for a friend who going through a hard time and think how you might offer similar comfort to yourself.

Do you face any particular emotional challenges at this time of year?

What are some ways you can take care of all your emotional needs over the Holiday Season?

- * **Resist the urge to fall in the NewYear's Diet Resolution Trap.** I am not a fan of diets in general, because I believe they play havoc with our relationship with food, put us at risk of disordered eating, and are harmful to our health. I prefer to encourage a mindful or intuitive approach to eating, one that is about regaining the communication and trust we used to have with our bodies. I truly believe when we can ditch the diet mentality and regain a joyful and stress free relationship with food, our bodies naturally lead us to eating a varied diet that supports our wellbeing. That isn't to say I don't support having goals and making shifts in our lives. But I think a reframing away from resolutions to say, **intentions**, can help us move forward toward our greater health and wellbeing goals in a way that is mindful, compassionate and supports our success.

Some Examples of 'Diet Mentality'

- feeling guilty when eating foods thought of as 'bad'
- using exercise to 'compensate' for eating
- eating is usually done according to 'rules'

Set Your Body Positive Holiday Intention.

So let's do it!

Take some time to focus on the **reason you celebrate**. Do you have a spiritual or religious focus, or do you like take the opportunity to celebrate community and family? Maybe you just think a celebration filled with good will, inner reflection and sparkly lights is just a good idea to keep us all from going crazy during the long, dark winter season?

What are my reasons for the season? What is important to me at this time of year?

Keeping in mind the elements we've discussed already that resonate with you and your deeper focus for this Holiday Season, decide on a body-positive intention for the holidays

That's it! I hope you have found this worksheet helpful. Wishing you a peace-filled, and a body-positive Holiday Season.