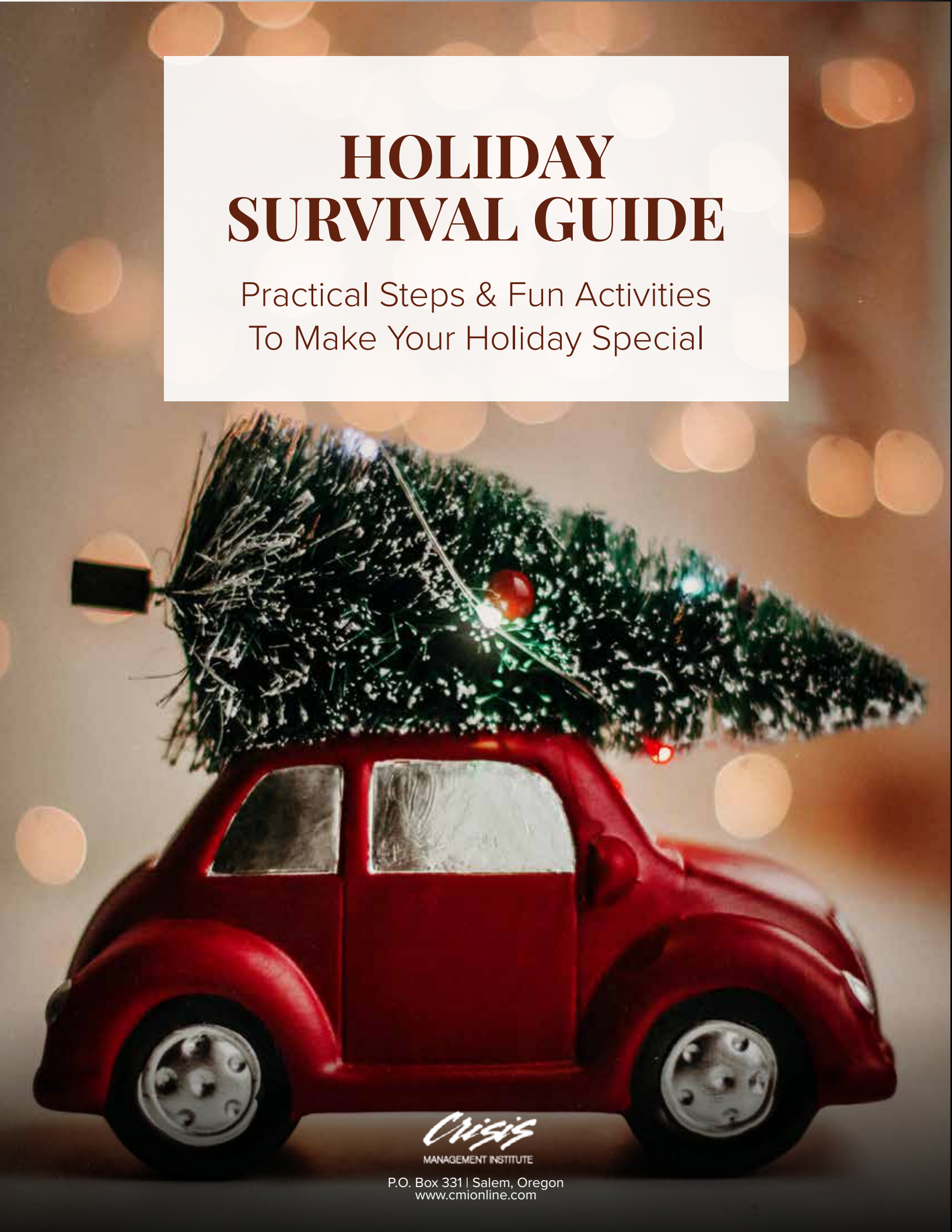
HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

Practical Steps & Fun Activities To Make Your Holiday Special



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Seeing loved ones can be one of the best parts about the holiday season.

In fact, many of us are used to attending events with both friends and family we don't see at any other time of the year. Whether it be work parties, family gatherings, or gift exchanges, most of it is not happening this year. Covid has changed much.

This year's Covid restrictions require us to approach our holiday celebrations with intentionality, creativity, and patience. While this holiday season won't be like any other we've ever had, we have an opportunity to invite meaning and deeper relationships with a little planning.

> "Success is where preparation and opportunity meet. *Bobby Unser*

Uncle Joe will may still bring up politics. Aunt Sally might spike the punch. And our darling niece and nephew will run rampant through the house. But we'll most likely see it all on screen or hear it through a phone call instead of witnessing it in person.

While this year may be more difficult than previous holiday seasons, we have the opportunity to change the way things unfold. We can forge a new road and steer our celebrations in a different direction by laying some simple ground rules and introducing a new way of interacting with one another. The tips and activities outlined in this book are meant to be a starting point to help you enjoy a memorable holiday season during this unique time.

Cheri Lovre and the Crisis Management Team

PEACE & CALM

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR CELEBRATION

In the midst of anticipating the fun of the holidays, there is also wisdom in acknowledging the heightened state of caution we're in as well. We can alleviate much of this Covid-induced holiday stress by laying some ground rules and creating some boundaries about our interactions.

It's important to clarify for ourselves individually what is acceptable and what is not, for if we don't, some may cross our unspoken boundaries and unknowingly cause stress, discomfort, or illness.

While we can't control everything, we have much more influence than we think. We can frame some ground rules, or at least lovingly ask that we honor one another and our limitations. If we make these boundaries, expectations and hopes clear, we can more easily set the stage for a safe, healthy, meaningful holiday season. For everyone. Even in the middle of Covid.

What's the benefit? Frank conversation about celebrating the holidays around Covid can deepen our relationships. We can build a mutual respect with our loved ones as we make our wishes clear rather than avoiding this potentially difficult discussion.

The following ground rules for any Covid discussions will help:

LISTEN

In our 5 Radical Minutes school program, we teach students the difference between hearing and listening. The first has to do with acknowledging sound. It's passive. The second is active and comes from the heart. Active listening is evident in body language: stop what you're doing, make eye contact, and lean in.

REFLECT

Before you answer a question, think about what you're about to say. Before you respond to what someone else has spoken, reflect. Taking these few extra moments can help you be the encourager rather than the fixer, the hope-bringer rather than the dream-crusher.

SUPPORT

It is common, after we listen to someone else, to respond with recommendations or tips to help them accomplish what they've shared. Instead of responding in this manner, try to acknowledge the positive and leave things there. Don't try to advise or fix a thing. If someone wants advice, they can ask for it and then its fine.

Festive Frolic: Play Together

In the busy-ness of the holiday season, we often forget to make time for the *fun*. This year, as many of us are celebrating apart rather than in the same physical space, don't discount the ability we still have to embrace fun times. Below are a few ideas you can do together **over a video call**. Others you can accomplish with a **simple phone call**.

Activities

- **Play Charades.** Award special titles to the winners. These can be silly!
- **Rethink Trivial Pursuit.** For a new spin, consider using family facts or holiday facts.
- **Host a Scavenger Hunt.** Have an indoor one and an outdoor one.
- **Play Pictionary.** Team up with someone in another household.
- **Play "I Spy."** Make sure the item is something everyone can see on the screen.
- **Draw.** Give everyone 1 minute to draw as many things as possible using a circle

Daily During the Holidays

- **Gratitude Chat.** Share 3 things your thankful for (make them different every day)
- **FaceTime Favorites.** Share your favorite moment of the day
- **Wishes.** Share something you wish for that's not an object.

> "You can discover more about a person
> in an hour of play
> than in a year of conversation. *Plato*

Scavenger Hunt Ideas

Build a Snowman

- Something white & fluffy
- Sticks for his arms
- Something black & round for eyes
- Something for his big smile
- Something orange for his nose
- Hat
- Scarf
- Mittens

Around the House

- Best thing to snuggle
- Something that sparkles
- Something red
- Something green
- Something that makes you laugh
- Favorite thing to feel safe
- The biggest shoe you can find
- Something old
- Something new

Outside the House

- Biggest leaf
- Smallest pebble
- Something yellow
- Something soft
- Something that smells good
- Something that makes you think of winter
- Something that reminds you of a great memory
- Something that gets bigger
- Something that gets smaller

JOY & LAUGHTER

THE BENEFIT OF CONNECTION

We all need to feel safe, valued, connected, and purposeful. Life is full of paradoxes and opposites. No better words so aptly describe this Covid year. However, there are two things we know for sure: we all value a fresh start and we all need to make those around us feel safe. To accomplish this, home must be a place where your family feels valued, connected, and purposeful. Adults play a big role in this.

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Start your day with a gratitude mindset. This may be a quiet moment as you get dressed. You might add a few things you're thankful for to a running list on your phone as you prepare your morning coffee. There are many gratitude journal apps as well. However you mark your gratitude, be intentional. Allow gratitude to be the focus of your thoughts as early in your morning as possible.

KEEP YOURSELF CENTERED

Take a few minutes to get centered. Breathe deeply 3-4 times to slow all the things going on in your mind and body. Keeping your emotions in check and staying calm throughout the holiday will not only allow you to interact more authentically, you'll be more available to your loved ones.

FIND A POSITIVE FOCUS

You have a choice in how you look at your day. You can dread certain aspects, focus on your fatigue, and assume that Covid has ruined everything. OR you can lean into your day assuming that you'll do something kind for someone. Choosing to be positive will allow you to touch the lives of those around you in a powerful way.

BUILD COMMUNITY

Look for every opportunity to build community this holiday season. Notice times your language could be more inclusive. Add more suggestions for ways your family might work on things together during problem solving, reinforcing the message, "Two heads are better than one." Implementing each of these things in a systematic yet heartfelt manner will help make your home feel safe, and your family feel valued, connected, and purposeful.

Conversation Starters

You may want to choose just one conversation starter at the beginning of your meal. To help set the stage for positive conversation throughout the meal. Consider doing an additional conversation starter during dessert.

- What's something you'd like to accomplish in the next year?
- What are the moments of kindness that speak to you the most? (Or: During times that you experienced kindness, which meant the most to you?)
- What's one of the most meaningful things that's happened in your life lately?
- How did you meet your closest friend or significant other?
- What's one of the funniest things that's happened in your life this year?
- What's one of the best surprises you've received?
- What's the best aroma of the day?
- What's the most memorable meal you had this past year? Who were you with and what was the conversation around the meal?
- What's the strangest thing you've ever eaten?
- What are you proud of about yourself this year? Personally, at work, in a relationship... even if it seems small, it's worth celebrating!
- When you think back to last year's holiday season, what was the most meaningful thing that happened? Was it a moment you remember? A person? A kind deed?

When you're done answering a prompt, consider going around the table a second time to allow everyone to respond to what each person said. This would give all the opportunity to ask questions like, "How could people support you?" or "Is there anything else you'd like to add?"

Nostalgia: Cook Together

You might not be in the same kitchen, but that doesn't mean you can't cook together. Food is almost an instant memory maker because it involves so many senses and both sides of the brain.

- Consider doing your holiday meal planning as a family, even if you won't be dining at the same table. This would be a great time to share favorite foods and must-haves and heighten the anticipation for the official day of celebration.
- Find one item on the holiday meal list you can all make, no matter where you are in the world. Set a time to prepare it and all join in the fun as you measure, chop, mix, and bake.

> "Cooking with kids is not just about ingredients, recipes, and cooking. It's about harnessing imagination, empowerment, and creativity. *Guy Fieri*

- Assign cooking partners if you're making similar items. Maybe Grandma pairs with the kindergartners and moms all work on an item together.
- Share family stories or memories as you prepare. Things like, "*I remember Grandma used to make this...*" and "*Don't forget that time the dog found the pies cooling on the back porch..*" make for a day filled with laughter and allow you to pass down family history in a fun, memorable fashion.

MERRY & BRIGHT

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Most of us anticipate a merry and bright holiday season. There's nostalgia in the glowing lights and festive decorations. Favorite foods are bursting from the oven. We typically whirl through the holidays with almost frenetic energy, sustained by the magic.

But in this season of instability and uncertainty, it's easy to second guess ourselves and reproach ourselves for what we can and cannot manage. For most of us, nerves are frayed and fatigue is the norm. The endless days at home can feel overwhelming. Our capacity is less than what it was before the pandemic. Remember this: ***It's okay to not be okay. It's okay to scale back what we do during the holidays.***

> "You are enough just as you are. *Meghan Markle*

Before we dive too deeply into holiday commitments or endless online shopping this year, let's take a moment to check in with ourselves. Before we chase online sales, hoping we'll have enough presents under the tree to make everyone feel better, let's pause.

Let's remember what's most important right now. Family. Friends. Gratitude. Joy. These are things we can't put a price on. Let's honor them with the most valuable thing we can — our attention. Let's commit to being fully present. Let's savor anticipation by embracing downtime between our holiday activities. Let's loosen our grip on some of our traditions to make space for new ones.

But most of all, let us learn to quiet ourselves. We are enough, just as we are.

Warm & Cozy: Eat Together

Holiday get-togethers usually mean a hustle and bustle of excitement as everyone gathers and brings their contribution to the meal. There's chit chat in the kitchen and football games on the television. The air is filled with an excited buzz.

For most of us, that's not the 2020 reality. But that doesn't mean we can't eat together. Set a mealtime, pull a monitor into the dining room, and invite everyone to gather virtually. Consider the following activities for this shared mealtime:

- Assign one person from each household to have a question ready to discuss during the meal. Keep it light and something that will keep people smiling.
- Create or provide a write-on table covering or placemats for people to color.
- Have each household write up fortunes and take turns drawing them for each person in the virtual group.
- At some point during the meal, let everyone share a good memory. You can limit it to holiday memories or open it up to be one of the best memories of all time.
- Leave your phones in another room for the duration of dinner.
- Take a moment to acknowledge each person's contribution to the mealtime. Also share which recipes were made together virtually.

> "Sitting down to a meal together draws a line around us. It encloses us and strengthens the bonds that connect us with other members of our self-defined clan.
>
> *Miriam Weinstein*

Deck the Halls: Decorate Together

Most families have decorations that have a story behind them. Maybe you picked up this ornament on vacation, or when your oldest was first born. Maybe you have years and years of stories built up about your annual Christmas tree hunt. Maybe one year a mouse built a home in your artificial tree box.

Whatever your family's ornament history, each item provides the opportunity to tell a story. Share the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions you remember from past years as you decorate this year.

Holiday decorating also gives us a chance to remember old decorations and create new ones.

There's a lot you can do over the phone or during a FaceTime call if you put your mind to it. **Maybe this is the year to:**

- Build some paper chain garland
- Paint some simple wooden ornaments
- Fold origami stars in all different sizes
- Start an Advent calendar
- Make gingerbread decorations
- Mix up some salt dough and make mini wreaths
- Cut pine boughs and cover the railings or mantle
- Wrap your front door like a present

Give Thoughtfully: Do Together Projects

The holidays have come more quickly than most of us anticipated. Covid is changing many family plans when it comes to who, when, where, and how to celebrate. If you're exchanging gifts with those apart this year, consider gifts that can be enjoyed together over a distance.

- **Journaling Pairs**. Use the same prompts for each day and have each person write a response. Share your thoughts together a few times each week.
- **Story-time Books.** Buy two copies and read it together.
- **Drawing / Doodle Books.** You can learn to draw together even if miles separate you. Pick a time each week to draw together. Share your drawings when you're done.
- **Decorate Cookies.** Send half a batch of cookies to your loved one and decorate them together.
- **Send a Subscription.** Let your loved one know you'll be sending a surprise every single month. This can be a card, a new book, or a monthly baking treat from your own kitchen. Ask them to call you before they open it so you can share in the joy together.
- **Schedule a Movie Night.** Watch it together (or at the same time) and share your thoughts afterwards.
- **Give Seeds**. Plant your seeds at the same time and watch them grow together.
- **Create a Letter Collection**. Write encouraging notes. Label the outside of the envelopes "Open when...."
  - ... I really miss my friends.
  - ... I don't want to do my homework.
  - ... It's my birthday.
  - ... I do something amazing!

Add Sparkle: Plan Ahead

Playing hostess often means anticipating special needs and creating a welcoming space to put others at ease. Make your holidays shine with special touches that will make your guests feel welcomed into your home, even if it is through FaceTime. Consider the following ideas:

- Place pictures of your loved ones around your home.
- Decorate with items that have shared memories with those not with you in person.
- Engage as many senses as possible. Talk about smells so they can experience them with you.
- If you're sharing the meal together, position their view so it feels like they're at the table with you.
- Include them in side conversations so it feels like they're really there with you.
- Consider mailing them something ahead of time that's part of your table setting or decor, or a special memento of the day. Ask them to wait to open it until you're on the phone together.
- Brainstorm as a family various ways you can help others feel part of your celebration.

"People will forget what you said. They will forget what you did. But they will never forget how you made them feel. *Maya Angelou*