

Having difficult holiday conversations about COVID-19

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December is traditionally a time for family and friends to gather and celebrate the most wonderful time of the year. But the COVID-19 pandemic will make this season difficult for many, as health experts recommend staying at home and celebrating the holidays with only your immediate household.

Dr. Craig Sawchuk, a Mayo Clinic psychologist, says it's important to be open and honest with your [family members](#).

"Do what's most important for your values. And if the values are keeping yourself safe and the ones that you love safe, then it's really important to be clear with that," says Dr. Sawchuk. "Sometimes values will conflict with each other, so our value of keeping our loved ones and ourselves safe can come into [conflict](#) with the desire to be with them."

He recommends having those difficult conversations early and not immediately before the holiday gathering.

"Sometimes, you know, we can be pleasantly

surprised. They may be understanding, on the same page with us, as well. But other times, they may not understand, and that may cause some friction. So having that conversation earlier is really important," says Dr. Sawchuk.

He says it's important to be empathetic when you communicate your decision to stay home for the holidays, and not turn it into a debate.

"Keep the statement short and simple: 'I love you. I want to be with you. And I'm choosing to stay home this year,'" says Dr. Sawchuk. "And sometimes, we may get pushback because people may feel very strongly about their opinions and why you should be with them. And we understand that it's coming from a good place. But those times, it's good to be in a broken record routine: 'I love you. I want to spend [time](#) with you. And I'm choosing to sit this one out this year.' And you may have to repeat that phrase a couple of times. And ultimately, they may have to accept the circumstances. But what's really important is you do those things that are in accordance with your values."

There are many ways that you can stay connected with family and friends without gathering in person. He says while it might not be the [social experience](#) that people are accustomed to during the holidays, given the circumstances, it's important to be flexible.

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