

# Helping those in recovery when they come home for the holidays

December 20 2018, by Patrick Kane

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The holiday break—packed with celebrations, family, friends and travel—can be hard on many people. Those in recovery from addictive behaviors face particular pressure during the holidays.

VCU News checked in with Tom Bannard, program coordinator with Rams in Recovery, about how to ensure your [holiday](#) activities are recovery friendly.

## **For those who are not familiar, what is collegiate recovery? Why is it important for student success?**

Collegiate recovery is a movement across the United States to provide support and community in what is often a recovery-hostile college environment. The aim is to create a community and supportive campus so that students in recovery do not have to choose between their recovery and higher education. When students are supported in their recovery, they thrive and add tremendously to our campus community.

## **We all know it can be hard on any student to leave campus life and go home during breaks. What are the challenges facing those in recovery?**

I think there are many people who have a hard time with [family relationships](#), and have a hard time with [family](#) and holidays regardless

of whether they are in recovery.

People with substance use disorders aren't the only ones who use substances to deal with family over the holidays. For those in recovery, there can be a range of challenges with family. We know that [substance use disorders](#) are genetically influenced so people in recovery have a higher likelihood of a close family member with a substance use disorder. Regardless, the holidays are a time where people drink more than usual, and in many families, every event has alcohol.

Additionally, for those returning to their hometown there might be get-togethers at bars with friends from high school.

Finally, many people in the first few years of their recovery journey have a lot of shame and guilt about the damage they did in active addiction, or have yet to heal their relationships with [family members](#).

## **What else can be problematic at the holidays besides alcohol?**

I think people often feel pressure to make up for their failures (real or perceived) through gift giving or trying to make everything "perfect." If you have a family member in recovery, it can often help your family appreciate the important things about the holiday.

I will never forget my family coming to visit me in treatment on Christmas. I think our family now has a different perspective on how precious our time is together.

## **What are some ways family members or hosts can be more mindful and supportive?.**

There are a number of things that families can do.

- Minimize or eliminate serving alcohol during family events. If that is not possible, look for ways for the bar not to be the center of attention. Family members can choose not to drink in solidarity with their loved one.
- Go to a meeting with them or volunteer with them during the holiday if they are willing. This often can be a powerful experience for both of you.
- Express your gratitude and appreciation for their recovery journey.
- Ask them to help you with preparation, clean up, etc. Sometimes getting out of your own head is a great relief.
- Let them know that you recognize that their [recovery](#) is more important than any single family gathering.

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

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