



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 232 – Navigating Life Transitions During the Holiday Season
November 22, 2023

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[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson: Welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

[00:00:30] Kathy: Hello and welcome friends. Thanks so much for joining me for this shortened Wellness Wednesday episode, a little midweek boost to help keep your Warrior Vibe high.

The day after this podcast is released will be Thanksgiving in the United States. For many of us, myself included, we're in the throes of transition. It may be professional, such as career uncertainty or a change of some sort. Or it may be personal, such as adult children starting their own lives, the loss of a loved one, or a change in relationship status.

Which is why this time of year can be challenging. The holiday season is often presented as a time of unbridled joy, togetherness and celebration. But for many,



it can be a time of emotional sensitivity and vulnerability. And those who are experiencing life transition shifts can find these uncomfortable emotions heightened.

The holidays can act as a mirror reflecting back stark reminders of what has changed or no longer exists. The altered dynamics of our relationships can bring feelings of sadness, loneliness or remorse. You may feel like you'll never enjoy the holidays again and miss the way this time of year used to make you feel, those feelings of love, warmth, safety, wonder and peace you once felt during this time.

[00:02:09] I'm finding there are two overarching themes for me this holiday season. The first is giving myself permission to feel what I'm feeling. And the second is creating space by letting go of what no longer serves and keeping that space open to welcome the new as the New Year approaches.

I'll talk more about the second point in an upcoming podcast. But for today, let's focus on the first point and talk about how to keep ourselves well.

For me, I'm holding an intention to welcome whatever feelings rise, name them, and just let them be without attaching to the emotion to the extent I can. I know this is easier said than done. But I see this as a chance to deepen my daily journaling and meditation practices.

It's those two practices, along with eating well, moving my body, and getting ample sleep, that have kept me steady throughout this most recent life transition of losing my dad.



In complete transparency, toward the end of that process, there was time for none of those practices, as we kept the focus solely on him. But having those practices not only prepared me to handle the situation, it made it that much easier to begin to return to normal life.

And as I go deeper with my meditation, as I've been able to do these last few weeks, I find it offers insight and guidance on how to approach the holiday season. For example, when I mindfully sit each day, I ground myself by being in this moment, which allows me to appreciate the simplicity and beauty that's all around me, even when I'm feeling less than stellar.

[00:04:07] It's because of that practice that I'm reminded each day of the following:

- 1. The impermanence of all things.** While this can remind me of my sadness, I can watch those emotions shift and transform, just like life itself. And understanding that there is an unknown timeframe I'm living in intensifies the preciousness of the moment.
- 2. The acceptance of what is.** Buddhist meditation teacher, Tara Brach, has a wonderful phrase relating to acceptance, which is, "This belongs." I love this because it allows for our entire experience without judgment. We can feel sad and blessed at the same time.
- 3. Move forward with self-compassion.** My intention is to approach this season with kindness for myself, so I can feel empathy and compassion for



others who are experiencing loss, too. That connection can also bring gratitude for all of my blessings, both large and small.

[00:05:21] So with that as a backdrop, let's get practical with what we can do to navigate life transitions during the holiday season, with a focus on your well-being. Here are some strategies to consider:

- **Set realistic expectations.** Understand where you are emotionally as the holiday season begins. You know you won't feel like you did in years past, but to what degree do you want to participate? Do you want to actively engage or just make it through to January?

If you want to actively engage, consider highlighting a special tradition or create a new one. This works well if you're longing for the feeling of familiarity and memories of good times. You can include family traditions, such as a dish, an activity, or a decoration, or create a new tradition that can be handed down to future generations. This is a wonderful time to take a fresh look at established traditions and make changes to align with what family members enjoy today.

If you're focused on just getting through, consider not celebrating. The year my mom died, I took a plane to a warm climate and spent the time watching the sunrise and walking the beach with my partner at the time. I called family members back home while I was away, but it was a one year break that I never regretted. You might choose to stay home, take a trip, or volunteer, which is a healthy way to lift your spirits.



[00:07:05] And here are some things to consider for anyone who's navigating a life transition during the holiday season:

- **Allow feelings to surface.** Whenever it feels overwhelming, find a quiet place to pause and process.
- **Take time for yourself.** This can be the busiest time of year. Find pockets where you can enjoy some downtime. If it feels right, you can also spend time with a loved one's memory, doing an activity, watching a movie you both loved in the past, or looking through old photos.
- **Talk about it.** The people who love you will want to support you, but sometimes they don't know how. It's okay to talk about how you're feeling and ask for help if you need it. Share stories. And don't hesitate to seek professional help. There are many options now, both in person or online, to match your level of need and comfort.
- **Take care of yourself.** This might not be the right year to overindulge. Instead, get enough sleep, eat well, move your body, and surround yourself with positive reinforcement.
- **Be kind and patient with yourself.** Think about how you'd support a friend who's experiencing a life transition and offer yourself the same. Check in often and give yourself what you need. Do what serves you at this time.



- **Set loving boundaries.** Allow yourself to say no to activities you don't want to do. Being clear about how you want to participate will protect your emotional well-being while participating to the degree that suits you.

[00:09:03] And now your takeaway. As you can see, there is no one size fits all approach. And I've found the best way to navigate life transitions during the holidays is to have clarity on what feels right for you.

Here are three journaling questions that I used in 2020, the year we were in lockdown and couldn't celebrate the holidays with our loved ones. Here are the questions:

1. What is the essence of the holiday season for me?
2. How will my relationship with the holidays change?
3. How would I like to welcome the new year?

Here are my answers from back in 2020.

- 1. What is the essence of the holiday season for me?** If I set aside media fueled images of perfection and reflect on what makes December special, I feel the holiday spirit in my heart and with my senses. The aspects that bring me joy are connecting with those I love, giving to others, expressing gratitude, creating special meals, enjoying the winter weather and relaxing in the glow of the fire.
- 2. How will my relationship with the holidays change?** In the past, there have been immovable boundaries - office holiday parties, set celebration times



with family, holiday traditions, etc. Expectations have shifted from customs to safety. Visits with loved ones will be in smaller groups and on different days. And for me, this comes as a relief as I can focus on being present and spending quality time.

- 3. How would I like to welcome the new year?** New Year's is my favorite holiday because it feels like receiving the gift of a clean slate. Since I opt for quiet celebrations at home, the change will be minimal. I'm planning on preparing and enjoying new dinner and cocktail recipes by the fire, while engaging in conversation about the past year and the one on the horizon.

I'll take a fresh look at those questions in the wake of losing my dad. But my gut feel is that the answers will be a lot like 2020, although our gatherings will definitely be larger.

[00:11:37] As we wrap up this episode, keep in mind that whatever life transition you're navigating will be magnified during this time. You may not feel like celebrating or your sadness may intensify and even lead to feelings of loneliness. Being truthful with yourself, taking care of yourself, and creating a new path for yourself will get you through the holiday season.

Lastly, I'd like to encourage you to add a little sparkle at the end of your year. something that brings a bit of sweetness and beauty to the season. Perhaps it's a favorite daily ritual, like enjoying coffee in bed before sunrise. Or maybe you can sink into an inspiring book. Perhaps you can get outdoors each day to enjoy the seasonal weather.



[00:12:28] It's been said that time heals all wounds. But it's been my experience that while this is true, we all heal in our own way and in our own time.

As you navigate your transition during this holiday season, I'm wishing you a bit of ease, beauty and healing, as you find your own way in your own time.

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[00:12:54] Kathy: Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!

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[00:13:57] [END OF AUDIO]