



Holiday self-care in dysfunctional families

by Rick Belden

A holiday can be a minefield of triggers, expected and unexpected, for those of us who grew up in dysfunctional/abusive/neglectful family systems. If you're one of us, take care of yourself at holiday time. Give yourself the option to step away from family activities and interactions if you need to. Make a safe space for yourself. Allow time and space for whatever feelings may come up and be as kind to yourself as you can.

You're not obligated to sacrifice yourself to "keep the peace" or make others happy at the expense of your own sanity and well-being. It's not your job to help maintain the illusion of a happy, healthy family and it's not your job to fix your family or save it either. It's never the child's job to fix or save the family, although many of us feel and were conditioned to feel otherwise. If other family members aren't motivated to acknowledge and address issues, there's nothing to be done but care for yourself.

A corrupt family system will eat you alive no matter how much you try to keep silent and appease it. It will keep on taking as long as you keep on giving. You're not a child anymore and you're not trapped. Walk away if you need to. Cry and rage if you have to. Be the "bad guy", the "troublemaker", the black sheep, [the scapegoat](#), the one who "ruins everything" if you have to, but don't give up your life for a family that can't even see who you are and never will.

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Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [*Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood*](#), is widely used in the United States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men's groups as an aid in the exploration of masculine psychology and men's issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [*Scapegoat's Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within*](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

More information, including excerpts from Rick's books, is available on his [website](#) and [blog](#). You can also find him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).