

MR@TT

Make Room @ The Table

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TABLE FOR ONE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON?

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR A FESTIVE SOLO HOLIDAY

Many people anticipate the end of the year holidays — Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve — as joyful occasions to exchange gifts, savor yummy goodies and kick up their heels with friends and family.

But for others — especially many older people — the holidays aren't merry occasions. Friends and family members, with whom they once gathered on holidays, may no longer be able to join them for traditional elaborate festivities. Consequently, they may wind up spending lackluster holidays home alone.

Recognizing this, Make Room @ The Table has put together a list of economical and easy ways people can observe an enjoyable holiday by themselves.

In addition, Make Room @ The Table has created a second holiday list. This list is a cornucopia of low-cost ideas to encourage folks, who have a full plate of jolly companionship on the holidays, to dish out helpings of festive connectivity to those engaged in solitary celebrations.

All of these Make Room @ The Table recommendations consider the possible continuing need for mask wearing, social distancing and other appropriate restrictions necessary to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Feel free to post these lists on your website or publish them in your newsletters. But please make sure, if you do, that you credit Make Room @ The Table as the source for the Lists.

Make Room @ The Table is a Chicago-based affinity group comprised of experts engaged in the aging field. MR@TT's mission is to identify, share and develop strategies to alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older people.

TIPS FOR SPENDING THE HOLIDAYS ON YOUR OWN

1. Invite someone you know will also be alone to share a holiday meal via Zoom or in person. Talk about the dishes you've made for each course and why you included them on your holiday menu.
2. Bake some goodies to share with friends during the holidays. Experiment with new recipes. If they are a success — or a spectacular failure — display them on social media.
3. Schedule a Zoom date or in-person meal with friends on the day before a holiday or the days immediately after the holiday. Make that your “holiday celebration.”
4. Settle back in your favorite chair and become absorbed in a book you've been wanting to read.
5. Stream a film. Fix a snack that carries out the theme of the movie — an ice cream soda if watching Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney or some warm croissants, if catching a French film with subtitles.
6. Dive into a project — like cleaning your closets — that you've been meaning to do but haven't had time to tackle.
7. Go through photo albums, diaries and calendars and relive holidays past when you celebrated with friends and family and were not alone.
8. Take a walk by yourself or go for a ride. Or ask a friend or neighbor to join you on a stroll, staying socially distant and masked, if that seems prudent.
9. Write a note to people you are thankful are in your life and mail it, so your greeting arrives on the holiday. Or reach out to them by phone, e-mail or text and wish them a “lovely day.”

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10. Sign up to participate in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count that takes place from December 14, 2021, to January 5, 2022. The bird count is free, but you need to register in advance. For more information, visit <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.
11. Begin a journal or add to one you've already begun. Consider starting work on a memoir. Emphasize gratitude and the things in your life for which you are thankful.
12. Attend a religious service either online or in person.
13. Get tickets to a virtual or in-person play, musical, jazz performance, dance recital or concert during the holidays.
14. Offer to take care of a pet for a friend or neighbor, who will be spending the holidays out of town. If feasible, volunteer at an animal shelter on the holiday.
15. Plan a micro "adventure" — take a bus or cab or drive to a different neighborhood and view the holiday decorations outside the homes and in the stores. Sample hot chocolate and a pastry — or a holiday treat — in a local café you've never been to before.
16. Check to see whether Mather Telephone Topics or Well Connected or other learning or social programs designed for older people are available via Zoom — either by phone or online — on the holidays.
17. Write a story... create a poem... or make up a song. Begin knitting a sweater or scarf. Engage in a craft to make special presents for those on your gift list.
18. Invite friends and neighbors to your home — or to Zoom — early on New Year's Eve. Share champagne or wine and snacks to launch a New Year's celebration. If you're going to be home alone at midnight, arrange to call a friend or family member who is also alone as the clock strikes 12 to usher in the new year.
19. Offer to fill in for a volunteer, so that person can celebrate with family. If it's feasible to volunteer in person, you can do so. If not, see if there is a way you can volunteer online or by phone.

20. If you are spending the holiday on your own as the caregiver for an older loved one, who is physically challenged or cognitively impaired, try brightening up your festivities by singing familiar seasonal songs, listening to holiday music together, or collaborating on simple projects like stringing popcorn garlands, decorating wreaths or wrapping presents.
21. Contact a local university alumni relations office or community liaison department and ask if there are foreign students or faculty members, who won't be traveling to their home country for the holidays. You could offer to host an informal get together with them, such as a virtual or in person caroling party on Christmas Eve or a Christmas or New Year's Day virtual — or real live — open house.
22. Plan ahead to cook a special holiday dish or entire meal for yourself. Or place an order for a holiday banquet from a restaurant or grocery store. Set the table with your favorite china and glassware. Make a centerpiece of brightly colored gourds, a Hanukkah Menorah, Christmas poinsettia, or Kwanzaa Kinara with Mishumaa Saba candles. Dress in your holiday best.
23. Ignore the holiday and view it as just another day. Stick to your usual routine, take something out of the freezer and savor the gift of quiet time alone.

TIPS FOR REACHING OUT TO THOSE YOU KNOW WILL BE ALONE ON THE HOLIDAYS

1. Call a friend or family member, who will be alone on the holiday. Perhaps you can coordinate with others who know the person, to space out calls throughout the day.
2. E-mail someone who's alone on a holiday. Send a video greeting from you, and, if appropriate, members of your family.
3. Arrange an in person or virtual caroling party on Christmas Eve that includes friends and family members who will be alone.
4. Enlist young folks to become pen pals, sending cards and letters — or poems, drawings, and stories — to older people who are alone on the holiday.
5. Send a beautiful, animated e-card to be delivered on the holiday to a person alone. Have the personal message on the card reflect your gratitude that the person is in your life.
6. Make time on the holiday to set up a Zoom date with someone who is alone. If feasible, include family members or mutual friends. During the virtual visit, you could light the candles together in a Hanukkah Menorah or a Kwanzaa Kinara, or trim Christmas trees.
7. Set aside a portion of your holiday dinner for a friend who is observing the holiday alone and deliver it to their door.
8. Screen share a movie or football game on the holiday via Zoom with someone alone ... or view the football game or movie separately and text or talk about what you watched by phone afterward.
9. Send or lend a book you enjoyed or found meaningful to a friend, who will be alone on the holiday, and then plan to discuss it with the person by phone or Zoom on the holiday or shortly thereafter.

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10. Arrange to have a Zoom date — or in-person meal — the day before the holiday or the weekend after with a friend, who’ll be observing the holiday alone. Make your get-together a “holiday celebration.”
11. Cook with friends, who will be alone. Whip up innovative holiday delicacies during an in person or virtual latke baking contest — or concoct tempting Yule logs or elaborately decorated Christmas cookies. Then sample some of your culinary creations together and comment on how they turned out.
12. Sing holiday songs with a friend or friends virtually via Zoom or over the speakerphone.
13. Write “letters of gratitude” to friends you know will be alone. Mail them so they will arrive the day before the holiday but write “Do Not Open Until” — whatever holiday it is — on the envelopes.
14. Invite a friend or neighbor who is alone to go for a walk — masked and socially distanced, if prudent — on the holiday.
15. If someone you know lives alone but has holiday plans, check in at the end of the day to make sure those plans came to pass. If the plans fell through, the person will be disappointed and lonely, and will be pleased to have the human contact. If the holiday get-together took place as scheduled, the person will be delighted to have the chance to share details with a friend.
16. See if your Village, Senior Center, House of Worship, or older adult social organization can arrange a virtual dinner or open house on the holiday to provide social connectivity for folks who’ll be by themselves.
17. Make room at your table virtually...or in real life. Add a person who is alone to your guest list to dine with you and your family on the holiday. If it’s too much of a hassle to include someone who’s alone for an entire holiday meal, ask them to share dessert with you and your other guests. Or invite someone who is alone to dine with your family the night after the holiday and join you in a traditional holiday feast of leftovers.

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