

## 302: How to Have Stress-Free Holiday Gatherings



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jen Riday**

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. I'm Jen Riday and on this episode I'll be sharing a few thoughts on how to be the most stress-free host you can be for the holidays and how to feel stress-free as the visitor. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey there, it's the holiday season which means you are probably going to be gathering with family, friends or loved ones. Now, with gathering can come drama. Drama happens when you put a lot of people together each with a different idea, or image, or picture in their minds of how things should go, different things they like to talk about, different ways of handling stress and emotions and drama will happen.

We always seem surprised when drama happens because we think the holidays are going to be picture perfect. And when they're not perfect we feel we have failed. The holiday has failed. The holiday is ruined. I want to prevent that from happening for you so I'm going to share a few thoughts on how to be a better host and be a better visitor for these holiday gatherings.

For example, as the host I hope that my visitors will be on time, that they will compliment my tree and my food, that they will help to clean up, that they'll play a board game. And if things don't go according to plan things will be fine but I might feel a little bit grumpy or miffed. They didn't say anything about my food, how rude.

Now, as the visitor what might be going on in our minds? Perhaps you think I hope there's no drama. I hope the host is happy and not controlling. I

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hope I can relax or take a nap. I hope that my parents will entertain my kids because I just drove all this way with them, and I need a break. I hope I get a gift that I like. I hope that someone will talk to me and ask me about my life and not just talk about themselves. I'll be complimented and people will like my lifestyle, and like what I'm doing, and like my kids, and not criticize me. Reasonable expectations.

So we all come in with a different script of how things should go, seriously. Some people like to go on a walk. And they might go on that walk right when you had planned to host the meal. So we bring all of these supposed scripts together for our performance. We all come to the stage. There is no script written down yet we all are expected to put on some kind of performance together that will make everyone happy. It's a recipe for chaos and disaster if you get my drift. So this happens.

How do we handle it? Well, number one, maybe, just maybe ahead of time we ask people what their script is for the holidays. What do they want? What do they envision? Maybe they envision reading books together by the fire the night before Christmas. Maybe they envision eating chili and oyster stew like my mom and then playing frisbee and croquet in the yard. Maybe they envision playing a certain card game, or that they can take a nap after the meal and watch football and not help clean up. Maybe that's part of their vision.

Remember, we all have these experiences we've gathered over the years of how our families did it, how they do it on TV or on that show, or whatever else. And we bring these ideas, and we try to live out these scripts of how we've seen holidays done before and they don't always mesh, and people can get a little miffed because we think everyone else should have the same vision we have.

So number one, share our scripts, ask your mom, your dad, your spouse, your kids, your friends, whoever's going to be there, what do they hope it

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will be like? What do they picture that they'll be doing? What will be happening after the meal, before the meal? Where will they play? What will they talk about? What games will be played, what music, what TV, etc.? So number one, create a shared script.

Now, funny enough, number two is ditch the script. The fact is the scripts aren't going to mesh. We can try to meet the basic needs of especially the hostess' script because she's done all the work of decorating, and preparing food, and cleaning. We should all work hard to help the hostess feel successful at hosting the event, the host or hostess. But in the end what if we all come onto the stage to perform this play or musical, that is our holiday gathering, we don't have a shared script?

What if we just allowed it to be an improv performance, a total adlibbed event? Because that's what happens anyway, isn't it? For example, at these events, at these holiday gatherings there is always too much noise and overstimulation. Somebody spills, someone arrives late, someone leaves early, someone doesn't show up at all even though we expected them. Someone feels left out. Someone can't hear. There is always the crazy uncle or the nosy aunt. You might receive a gift you hate. Someone might vomit all over the carpet.

There's drama and emotions, people who talk too loud, people who talk too quiet, nobody listening to you, that one person talking politics. And then on the other side that person making a racist comment. It will all happen. We think it won't because we've got a script in our minds of the perfect holiday. But inevitably these things happen.

What if this year we decide not to be surprised by it and instead look at it with curiosity and say, "Fascinating, we're all on this stage together putting on this performance or play, or musical and there's Uncle Bob doing that craziness in the corner. Oh, look, there's vomit over there. And there's this crying child here. And Auntie Bertha doesn't love her gift. And that other

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person is criticizing how I raise my kids. This is the most fascinating thing.” So ditch the script, make it an improv because there is no shared script anyway.

Number three, and most important. Once you’ve ditched the script you can then focus on what’s really important which is connection. Connection includes things like hugs, backrubs, giving someone a foot rub if you want, expressing love, getting them a drink, going on a walk with someone.

And my especial favorite is holding space which means to listen deeply. How do you do this? You face someone directly looking in their eyes, your body square to theirs, leaning inward a little and imagine love flowing from your heart to theirs and listen to what they have to say. Ask an open ended question like, “What’s new with you? What’s been happening since I saw you last? What’s your favorite thing about the holidays?” Open ended questions cannot be answered with yes or no. They evoke a response.

And a lot of these people that will be gathering with you probably have been lonely throughout the pandemic. What if you show up instead of focusing on whether someone likes you or listens to you or if you fit in, what if you show up focusing on connecting, showing love, meeting other people’s needs, helping them fulfill their holiday script. You can ask three basic questions in fact to help you with this connection.

Number one, how can I share love right now? What if that was your focus? And you set the intention to hold space and listen with your heart to every single person there. I can promise you, this will not only fill their cups, but it will fill your cup because that type of deep heart-centered connection is very filling and nurturing for both the listener and the speaker.

Number two, walk around with the question in your mind of what do they need? What does my mom need right now? How does she look? Does she look stressed, frazzled, tired? What can she need? I’ll go wipe that table off

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for her. I'll clear those dishes. I'll give her a backrub. I'll encourage her to take a nap. What do they need?

And finally, last but not least of course is what do I need? Noticing how you're feeling, taking a break, taking a walk, taking a little nap, whatever you need to feel calm, and grounded, and centered. And that is the recipe for a calmer holiday gathering.

Yes, the chaos will happen but instead of being upset by it or shocked by it, you just say, "Oh, interesting, look what's happening on this stage, this performance, this improv performance is amazing. Look at that, all these different personalities, all kind of trying to fulfill their own scripts and I'm here trying to show love, helping others meet their needs and trying to connect with everybody."

Last but not least I want to give you a boundary phrase. Tuck this in your pocket, pull it out as needed. It's very simple. It goes like this. I love you and... This is the way to start a boundary at a holiday gathering in a way that buffers any hard feelings. I love you and I strongly prefer you share something positive about my kids. I love you and I would rather not talk about politics. I love you and I need to take a break right now, I'm feeling overstimulated. It's as simple as that. I love you and I'd rather this, I'd rather that. Try it out.

Boundaries are so helpful in helping you to preserve and protect your precious energy during the holidays. You've totally got this, I know you do. You know how to take care of you. You know how to listen to your own heart. Now turn that outward, go in, notice what the shared script could be by listening to what everyone hopes to achieve during this gathering.

Number two, ditch the script, in other words plan on it being an improv and all these things happening on the stage that aren't part of the script because in the end they will happen.

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And number three, focus on sharing love and connecting, helping everyone there to meet their needs and you'll feel so good and fill your cup in the process.

Finally, don't forget your boundary phrase, I love you and...

My friends, I love you. I want to wish you a fantastic holiday season, whatever you're celebrating, solstice, maybe you've already celebrated Hannukah, you're celebrating Christmas or anything else. I hope you feel deep heart-centered connection. And remember, that starts in your heart. You can feel as connected as you want to feel. It doesn't matter what they say or what they do so much as it matters how you're feeling. You can generate the feelings of love and connection for all of these people you'll be with right in your heart right now.

You've got this, I love you and happy holidays. Take care.

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