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How to host virtual holiday celebrations

The 2020 holiday season figures to be vastly different than seasons past. The novel coronavirus COVID-19 has transformed daily life in many ways. The public has become accustomed to wearing masks while shopping, limiting the number of people in public venues and keeping their distance from friends and loved ones. Many events have been reimagined as virtual celebrations because of social distancing protocols. For those with large families or people with inherent risk factors that make them more susceptible to illness, sharing the holidays over video conferencing apps may be the safest way to go in 2020.

The following tips can help holiday hosts make the most of a virtual holiday experience.

Pick a bright, festive spot
 Set up your tablet, smartphone or computer in a bright area with a festive backdrop. You'll want others who join the virtual hangout to be able to see you clearly. A Christmas tree or a decorated fireplace in the background can set the scene. Certain programs may work better than others depending on your needs. For example, if everyone has the same operating system platform (iOS or Android), you may be able to use an app inherent to that system, which won't require a separate download or login.

Apps also may be chosen depending on how many people can be invited in, as some set limits. Do your homework and conduct a test run prior to the holidays.

Keep props nearby
 If the goal is to open gifts virtually, be sure to have everyone gathered and gifts nearby so no one is scrambling in and out of view.

Position the camera at eye level
 Try to set up the camera so you're not looking up or down. Practice looking straight into the camera instead of at yourself in the minimized window or even others on the screen. This way you'll appear engaged.

Use mute when not speaking
 Muting yourself (and encouraging others to do the same) when you are not speaking will limit the amount of background noise. As the host, serve as the moderator and encourage everyone to speak one at a time. Choose a visual cue to signal when someone has the floor to speak, such as raising a hand or even showing a festive picture.

Tune into virtual worship
 While some places of worship have reopened to some capacity, others may still be offering hybrid services. If your place of worship offers services via YouTube or another video platform, gather around and watch together and participate just as if you were there in person. Better yet, share the link with other family and friends so they can tune in as well.

Share dinner 'together'
 Set up your camera source so it captures the holiday table. All parties gathering virtually can then sit down to the holiday meal as one and enjoy one of the season's more endearing traditions.

Virtual celebrations may continue through the holiday season. Adapting with some video conferencing tips can ensure everyone enjoys the festivities.



Tips to De-stress

- Throw away your shopping list. Where possible, create memories instead of buying presents.
- Drop expensive, high-stress rituals and try a new tradition, like Christmas Eve Chocolate Chip Pancakes or Thursday drives to see the lights.
- Focus on what's most important - if you have 100 cards to send, try sending just the 10 most important ones and do the rest another time.
- Hold on to your own daily rituals to give you the peace to handle the craziness of Christmas. If you don't have any, pick one now to give you a chance to recharge!

(Information from Woman's Day)

Wishing everyone a warm and merry holiday season. Many thanks for your patronage during this difficult time and here's to the hope that 2021 will be "picture perfect".
 Sue

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