

Celebrating Holidays Inclusively at Work

Why is it important to be inclusive at work during the holiday season?

People come from a diverse range of faith and cultural identities. It's important to take a look at which traditions are being highlighted, which ones might be missing, and who is being excluded because of the way our workplaces celebrate the holidays. Each person in your organization will celebrate holidays differently, so recognizing and supporting an inclusive environment shows that you and your team care about everyone and ensures that nobody feels left out. **In other words, "holiday" is not synonymous with "Christmas."**



Tips for hosting an inclusive party in December/January

- Organize company holiday events reflecting an end-of-the-year celebration or theme - a party that celebrates your team's contributions over the past year.
- Be mindful of those who do not drink during celebrations and how you might be excluding people by making alcohol a big party theme. Make sure to include non-alcoholic options.
- Don't decorate based around one holiday.
- Make the party accessible for everyone - consider all the needs of your employees and make sure that the venue is accessible.
- Make a plan for those who work remotely - consider if you want to expense everyone the chance to join in person or if you're going to host a virtual event instead.
- Consider food restrictions and plan the menu with your team.
- Make gift exchanges optional - gift exchanges can create a financial burden for some employees.



Goals for inclusive holidays & celebrations to bring into 2023

- Ask employees what holidays they celebrate and which ones they would like to see recognized.
- Offer Floating Holidays. Allow employees to select which holidays they choose to celebrate and shift their 'stat holiday' days to a holiday more meaningful to them.
- Create and display a diverse holiday calendar in your workplace.
- Have a discussion about decorating within your office. Invite all staff to be involved in the discussion.
- Make participation for any holiday event truly optional.
- Consider employee backgrounds - for example, don't schedule a holiday party on a day that some employees are fasting for Ramadan.
- Create a way to receive feedback from your team about your inclusive holiday efforts and keep improving.

Fall and Winter holidays to add to your work calendar

Bodhi Day. This Buddhist holiday, which commemorates the day that Siddhartha Guatama, the historical Buddha, experienced enlightenment, is traditionally celebrated on Dec. 8.

Christmas. This celebration of the birth of Jesus, the central figure of Christianity, takes place on Dec. 25. For Eastern Orthodox Christians, it takes place on Jan. 7.

Diwali. This five-day Hindu Festival of Lights begins Oct. 24, 2022.

Eid al-Fitr. This celebration that marks the end of Ramadan in the Muslim faith has shifting dates and can sometimes fall in December. However, in 2023, it will start at sundown on Apr. 20.

Hanukkah. In 2022, this eight-day Jewish Festival of Lights will start at sundown on Dec. 18 and end at sundown Dec. 26.

Kwanzaa. This weeklong secular holiday honouring African-American heritage is celebrated Dec. 26-Jan. 1 each year.

Lunar New Year. This traditional Chinese holiday marking the end of winter falls on Jan. 22, 2023.

Yule. This Wiccan or pagan celebration of the winter solstice begins on Dec. 21 and ends on Jan. 1, 2023.

Source: Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.



Mental Health Tips during the Holidays

Holidays can bring up many emotions for people, including stress, grief, anxiety and depression. Sometimes, shortening days can impact people who have Seasonal Affective Disorder, or depression, and the holiday season can create pressure to “show up” when they can't. It can also negatively impact people who are struggling financially who cannot celebrate the way others around them are, among many other factors. Being mindful of this as you enter the holiday season, and how it could show up in your workplace is important to be able to better support your colleagues and teams.

- Acknowledge feelings - It is OK to take time for yourself.
- Reach out - Seek out community, religious or other social events, this could include virtual gatherings that can offer support. There are many online mental health service professionals that can support you during this time, see online resources like [BetterHelp](#).
- Take care of yourself - recognize that family members may not live up to our expectations and it is OK if you are not safe or ready to engage in discussions with them. To unwind from gatherings, consider reading a book, meditation, or listening to music.
- Create a budget - creating and sticking to a budget can be helpful to make the holidays more affordable.
- Say No - it is OK to miss workplace holiday gatherings or family gatherings if you do not feel included or to take better care of yourself. Prioritize the gatherings that are most important to you, and feel free to say 'No' to the others.

**Above list taken and adapted from the [Mayo Clinic](#).*

Resources for Further Learning

- [Holidays, Workplaces And Inclusion: How To Set The Right Tone For The Year](#)
- [8 Best Practices For Inclusive Holiday Celebrations In The Workplace](#)
- [10 Tips for Including People with Disabilities in Your Holiday Celebrations](#)
- [How to make your work party accessible to everyone](#)
- [How to celebrate the holidays in a multicultural workplace](#)
- [Inclusive Holiday Parties](#)

Canadian Equality Consulting's checklist to enhance the accessibility of your event



- Consider the timing of the event - avoid early morning and late evening due to caregiving needs
- Considerations for the venue - number of attendees; physical accessibility of the building (ensure doorways are clearly marked and have a min width of 32 inches), washrooms and event space; access to public transit, available parking and access to accessible parking; ample lighting for visual disabilities and safety; provide clear signage; ensure pathways at the event are clear and wide enough for mobility devices
- Consider the lighting, acoustics, and airflow - bear in mind that noise, flashing lights, and strong scents can trigger health issues for people; Consider the experience from the perspective of: mobility devices, assistance animals, people with low vision, auditory disabilities, and chemical sensitivities, etc.
- Ensure the event is promoted and advertised broadly - ask yourself who may be excluded?; does the advertising show diverse representation?; will the images be interpreted in the same way?; is the advertising in a language your audience will understand?; Are you using multiple methods of promotion (email, social media, website, flyers, etc. to enhance accessibility?); Use high contrast colours, text size 14 or larger; ensure marketing is compatible with screen readers
- Is there a clear contact identified where people could ask accessibility questions and seek accommodations to ensure they are comfortable and can participate freely at the event?'
- Provide live ASL interpretation and closed captions on videos
- Ensure water is readily available at multiple places throughout the venue; ensure caterers are aware of dietary needs and allergies and that all special meals are clearly labeled