Holidays, weddings, funerals and other family gatherings can be challenging times for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) clients. It is a time when your clients may traditionally get together and engage in family and religious rituals. For LGBTQ+ people whose families are not affirming, it may mean making a choice between being with their family of origin, being with a family of choice (friends and loved ones), or being alone. Here are some tips to help you to prepare your LGBTQ+ clients navigate family gatherings:

- If their family intends to participate in traditions, religious ceremonies, or visits with non-affirming family members, ask your client to consider sharing ground rules for the visit, your client is helping to set the tone and mutual boundaries
- If someone uses the wrong name or pronoun, do they want a supportive family member to jump in with a correction? Or would they prefer to be in control of deciding and how to correct others? It might be helpful for you to role-play that correction with your client so they know how to address it if it comes up. How will they address behavior that is not supportive? Here again, role-playing with client and then role-playing with others that the client wishes to avoid, explore with your client whether it is appropriate for them to let their family know that they may want to skip that part of the family ritual. Practice those conversations with your client so they develop strategies to approach these conversations.
- Help your client develop a plan for how non-supportive behavior will be addressed. For example, if someone uses the wrong name or pronoun, do they want a supportive family member to jump in with a correction? Or would they prefer to be in control of deciding and how to correct others? It might be helpful for you to role-play that correction with your client to see how they know how to address it if it comes up. How will they address behavior that is not supportive? Here again, role-playing with client and then role-playing with others that the client wishes to avoid, explore with your client whether it is appropriate for them to let their family know that they may want to skip that part of the family ritual. Practice those conversations with your client so they develop strategies to approach these conversations.
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This may be the first time someone has suggested they can make expectations of acceptance and affirmation from their families.

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How to help

- Before they go to family events, ask your LGBTQ+ client if their family is a source of support and affirmation. If not, support them considering their options and making a “family gathering self-care plan.”
- In supporting your LGBTQ+ client’s plans for attending a family gathering, ask them:
  - What they hope to occur
  - What they anticipate will occur
  - What they are willing to ignore
  - What they will not stand for

This is important.

- For clients who may not have a family or support system, but would like to build community, explore affirming social events and support groups that can help your client connect and celebrate with others.

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Sharing the plan with their family or support system

Your client’s family may be as anxious as your client is about the upcoming family gathering. It is especially true if your client has recently come out, has started dressing differently, is going by a different name, or announced they have a partner. By developing and sharing ground rules for the visit, your client is helping everyone to know what to expect and how to be affirming. Many families want to be supportive and sometimes need help knowing what that looks like. So it is important that your client be as clear as possible about what they need. As a provider, you can help them process and think through their expectations, plan, and self-care strategies.