

UW Health: Holidays may force tough COVID-19 conversations

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MADISON, Wis. – As families and friends plan Thanksgiving arrangements this year, the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing some to make difficult decisions. Discussing those decisions with family can be challenging.

Many people are grappling with whether to host family or friends they haven't seen in months or if they should travel to visit family who asked them to attend Thanksgiving gatherings, according to Shanda Wells, behavioral health specialist, UW Health.

"The emotions connected to these situations are very difficult to manage because on one hand, we love our families and want to see them, but on the other we want to be safe and protect everyone involved," Wells said.

Additionally, some family members may not have the same views on pandemic safety recommendations, like quarantining prior to visiting and mask use, and this can add another layer of complexity to managing family conversations, she said.

Wells does have advice for those facing these difficult conversations:

- Assume family and friends have the best intentions
- Don't try to convince the other person. Instead, try to genuinely hear them out
- Decide ahead of time what kind of boundaries you are willing to set
- Engage family and friends, but also acknowledge your own boundaries
 - For example: "I care about you and your health as well as the health of my family. I need your help to keep all of us safe."
- Acknowledge that everyone's tolerance for risk is different

Wells is available for interviews today.