

Holidays: Family Edition

Dealing with Stress and Simplifying the Mess

The holidays are here, which means it's time for shopping, family gatherings, celebrations, and of course, **STRESS**. While it is exciting to bring in the New Year, many find this a time of constant rushing from one event to another and managing vacation time. In addition to the typical stress one encounters, the economy is making Christmas shopping difficult. Whether its family issues or money issues, there are ways to reduce this stress and have a happier, healthier holiday.

Family

The holidays bring a lot of family events to attend, which can be stressful when trying to decide where to be and how to get everyone there at the right time. It also means along with seeing the family you've missed, you see those you have trouble getting along with. Knowing what to expect and how to handle the tension between family members is crucial to having a peaceful holiday. Here are some helpful tips to reduce stress and encourage better family interaction.

Take Turns

Sometimes visiting both partners' families can be difficult, particularly if the events overlap or you just don't have enough time. This time we have to take the same advice we tell our kids when they're young: Take turns. Sharing the time with each family can prevent future arguments. For example, visit your family for Thanksgiving and your partner's for Christmas or visa versa. Alternating by year is also a way to better manage your time with each family.

It's Okay to Say "No"

Time is a precious gift, and getting caught up in the events may deter you from spending quality time with your significant other and children. "We have to go to this..." will come up in conversation over and over around this time of the year, but guess what? You don't *have* to go to everything. Saying "no" once and awhile keeps you from being overburdened and leaves you with more time to spend with those closest to you. Less traveling and preparing means less stress. It's okay to go to a few functions, but when you find yourself stressing over what's next, don't be afraid to slow down for a little "you" time.

Boys will be Boys

We've all heard that expression. Well, parents will be parents. No matter how old you are, parents may continue to question, 'pester,' or critique your lifestyle. Being prepared for these interactions can help lessen the stress when it happens. Even if the family member you're concerned about spending time with isn't one of your parents, knowing what to expect and how to avoid conflict can help prevent dramatic situations. If there are conversations or comments that are repeated each year, decide how you will respond ahead of time and stick to it. Being able to say, "I understand that's how you feel," and then changing the topic can help deescalate conflict.

Costs of the Holidays

Let's face it; Holidays are an expensive time of year with gifts, travel, parties, and feasts. In these tough times, spending money is a big deal. Here are some techniques to reduce your debt, prevent stress, and hopefully lead to a more efficient holiday schedule, with less worry, and more peace.

Avoid the Credit Card

Everyone enjoys the feeling of a buy now, pay later lifestyle, but this can lead to some serious debt. The typical behavior with credit cards is to spend more money and make less frugal purchases. To avoid this pitfall, stick to cash when making your holiday shopping trip. Buy only what you have the money for and then stop. Counting out cash helps you see exactly how much you have to spend, can keep you from making pricey choices, and it can also help motivate you to find the best deal.

Shop Before the Good Deals Drop

Winter brings out the largest volume of shoppers than any other time of the year, which means prices start to soar right around the end of fall. Early shopping has advantages in two ways: lower prices and fewer shoppers (avoiding the insanity of Christmas mayhem). Less hassle for gifts and more money in your wallet means less stress for you.

Child Care

Children require special attention during the holidays, and it is important to remember to attend to their needs in order to ensure their safety and overall well-being. You may need to consider whether or not to bring a child, based on their age, to a party. Divorce can make the holidays tricky. And, many of us have the inevitable concern about how much is too much with regards to gifts.

Wild Parties and Children DO NOT MIX

There is nothing wrong with celebrating during holiday vacation, but some parties involve excessive drinking and other adult behaviors. When deciding whether or not to bring your child to a party, it is wise to consider your child's age. Are they too young to make good decisions about their own behavior, what will be modeled at the party, are they old enough that you have to worry about them participating in drinking, etc? You may consider calling in advance to determine whether childcare will be provided or if alternative planning is necessary. Relatives or close friends may be willing to provide, but it is also smart to have a babysitter list and plan babysitting fees into your budget so you aren't stuck at home at the last minute.

Planning Events in a Divorced Family

For divorced parents, it can be difficult to figure out how to share time with children and both sides of the family. It is important to be upfront and honest with your family and let them know that the children may not be able to come to every family event. Pick and chose events wisely so children get quality family time with both sides of the family.

Gifts for Kids

When buying gifts for children, it is not necessary to give them everything they want. The holidays are a great time to give children toys, but help them learn and understand the value of these gifts by encouraging them to buy or donate items to homeless shelters, consignment stores, or local charities. Remember that you can say 'no' to your children, and not buying them all the newest and most expensive gifts does not make you a bad parent.

Resources

http://stress.about.com/od/holidaysurvivalguide/ht/family_conflict.htm

<http://ezinearticles.com/?5-Holiday-Weight-Loss-Tips-and-Their-Reality-Checks&id=102551>