



# Coping With Holiday Stress!

The holidays can be the most hectic, stressful time of the year. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to reduce stress and make the experience more enjoyable for your entire family.

## Relax Your Expectations

We all have internalized the high expectations our society places on the holidays. The table is supposed to be piled high with irresistible foods. The children should be delighted with “visions of sugarplums” and a room full of presents. Movies tell us that families come together, forgiving and loving each other, like no other time of the year. These unrealistic expectations can put a tremendous amount of pressure on parents. Realize that no event, and certainly no family, is perfect. The “perfect holiday” only exists on the movie screen and glossy magazine pages. Learn to appreciate the real value of a “good enough” holiday season!

## Ask for Help

You are not a superhero. It does not matter how smart, creative, or determined you are, you cannot do it all on your own! The holidays belong to everyone; everyone needs to pitch in. Your children can do more than you think. Let your teen bake the desserts. They need to learn and you need the break. Let your partner clean the house. Are there streaks on the mirrors and a few dust bunnies left under the bed? Let it go. No one else will notice. Have your neighbor watch the children one day and you watch her children the next day. You won't get help unless you ask for it. Don't be shy; you deserve it!

## Rethink the Big Meal

Planning, preparing and cleaning up a holiday dinner can sap the strength from even the best of us. We spend many hours on a meal that is usually devoured in 15 minutes. That 15 minutes may be the only break you get all day. Is it really worth it? Why not try a potluck dinner? You provide the main dish and others bring the rest. Or order out for a few celebrations. The time you will spend with your family instead of in the kitchen could make a real difference!

## Keep Your Spending Under Control

The significant financial stress felt by most families during the holidays can take the joy out of exchanging presents. If you have a large family, you might suggest drawing names for gift giving. Your family will likely appreciate the suggestion. You could also give the gift of time. Instead of buying expensive presents for your nieces and nephews, you could take them all to a discount movie theater for an afternoon. Their parents will appreciate the break and you will save money while enjoying your relatives. Remember, expensive presents do not guarantee a happy family, but they will likely guarantee financial stress for you!

## Learn To Say No

The holiday season can bring a sometimes-overwhelming number of invitations and obligations. Parents and children often get worn out trying to do too much. Decide what is truly important for your family and decline all other invitations. You do not need to attend every social or family event. Take turns visiting your

and children often get worn out trying to do too much. Decide what is truly important for your family and decline all other invitations. You do not need to attend every social or family event. Take turns visiting your family and your partner's family each year. Tell your neighbors you can't make their New Year's Eve party, but you won't miss their anniversary celebration next month. Letting some invitations go will make the other events more relaxed and pleasurable for your entire family.

## Health and Happiness

The best gift you can give your children is health and happiness. The old adage "You can't provide for others if you don't care for yourself," rings especially true this time of year. Prioritizing and learning to let go will help you reduce your stress so the holidays can be truly enjoyable.

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