

Handling Stress at the Holidays

Terry Moore, LCSW

A Time for Friendship & Family

The Holidays can be a time to express love and caring for family and friends, co-workers and helpers. Somehow, the purpose of the occasion becomes obscured by a marathon of eating, buying, wrapping, and trying so hard not to overlook someone. What was meant to be a celebration can become a stressful overload - often straining the bonds we hope to strengthen at this time of the year.

Associated Counseling Professionals offers some suggestions for managing and avoiding stress for the holiday season.

Getting Clear about Expectations

One of the best things that you can do for having great Holidays is to get clear for yourself about what you include in your list of wants and needs at this time of year. Try to become aware of the priorities of the members of your family. Secondly, use these ideas to develop actions that you and others in the family can put into visible motion. Knowing which activities everyone really values will enhance your ability to proceed with action, minimizing guesswork. Having visible goals and boundaries with regard to activities, gifts, and spending will enable you to focus on enjoying the festivities as they happen. Simplicity may also be another important concept here.

Reflect for a moment upon what Holiday memories are sweetest or fondest for you. How many of them revolve around grand spending, elaborate plans, and non-stop parties? How many involve smaller groups of people with quiet activities - like tree decorating, storytelling, or caroling? Being honest with yourself about what you value (over what is supposed to happen) will guide you through this process

Family Times

Holidays bring us together with our families. We're often reminded of all that we had hoped for but couldn't make happen. Try:

- ÿ Introducing planned periods of alone time. Rest, recharge, rejuvenate! »
Lowering lofty expectations.
- ÿ Living in the present.
- ÿ Enjoying the act of giving.
- ÿ Being patient with the kids.
- ÿ Enjoying being given to, independent of the substance of the present.

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

The senses, the wallet, and our sensibility can all be assaulted by the potential overload of the Holidays. Be aware of your own limits, along with your tolerance

for exceeding them. Consider:

- Y Starting a few simple, new traditions.
- Y Choosing presents that are special, not unique.
- Y That presents are not your love wrapped in a bow.
- Y Finding out family favorites. Try picking one item to please each person.
- Y Delegating tasks. Get others involved.
- Y Eating right. Complex carbohydrates will soothe jangled nerves.
- Y Limiting alcohol consumption and offering alternative beverages.