

Family Gatherings

Its that time of year again!

With the holiday season comes a broad array of emotions, expectations and high-demands. This time of year brings many high hopes for the New Year and it is easy to get caught up in it all and become overwhelmed. Our culture bombards us from all directions with idealized images of what holidays are supposed to bring. Pair that with memories of unresolved conflict between family members and by the end of October you can feel the frustration starting to build. But don't throw in the towel at the first sign of autumn; here are ten ways to make the holiday season less stressful and more joyful.

1. Above all, developing realistic expectations is a sure way to avoid (or at least minimize) holiday stress. Enjoy each holiday for what it is, not for what you think it should be based on fairy-tales and movies. If your brother and sister have never gotten along, don't expect them to during a holiday celebration. And if your children expect more than you provide, it's time to teach them a lesson about the true meaning of the season. When you approach holidays in a realistic fashion, you set the stage for fun and success.

2. Learn to say "no". Struggling with too many obligations could create resentment and hostility as you find yourself trying to juggle holiday planning and preparation. Make a priority list and stick to it! Express yourself honestly right from the beginning, if you feel bogged down say so!

3. Create a budget, and stick to it! No matter how much your children try to tell you, money does not show love or happiness. The dollar amount is never as important as the love your gift displays. Set a monetary limit and get creative!

4. Start a new routine. If the old ones no longer work, create new and unique family rituals for the holiday season. As children grow and family members age it is important to remember that ceremonial procedures and customs also need to be updated.

5. Remember that it is never too late to start planning. The holiday season comes real fast and you don't want to be looking for the perfect outfit or gift a day before the event. Start buying gifts early; this will also help you to stay within your budget. Make a practical timeline of everything that needs to get done and split the holiday tasks between family members.

6. Get started on your New Years resolutions now. More and more pressure will build if you wait until the first of the year to

change your life. There will never be a better time than now to start modifying your behaviors.

7. Learn to give and you will also receive. Take the time to reflect on all that you have been given and provide that opportunity to others during the holiday season. Giving feels good in almost any context. Do something for someone or make contact with someone you've been thinking about for awhile.

8. Lighten up and learn to laugh at your shortcomings. Studies show that laughter causes the body to release feel-good endorphins, helps boost the immune system, tones muscles, and improves circulation and respiration. It also increases self-esteem, reduces stress, and can even lower blood pressure.

9. Learn to compromise and refrain from negativity. If you belong to a continually feuding family, think about how negative attitudes and expectations bring out the worst in people. Learning to compromise can be very difficult but is sometimes what it takes to get along with others. During the hustle and bustle we sometimes forget that life is too short for unnecessary disappointment and stress. Tolerance is usually the best medicine when faced with the reality that you cannot change how family members will think or behave.

10. And finally, if you know that your family gathering will only result in a screaming match, opt out. A family is what you make of it. Surround yourself with people that you love and admire during the holiday season.

Happy Holidays!



Dr. Elliot Goldstein is a licensed Clinical Psychologist. His career has spanned over 30 years and has included administering nationally known hospital and drug treatment programs. He received several awards for program development as well as recognition for facilitating top clinical programs. Dr. Goldstein also developed one

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