

HOLIDAZED??

Christmas... Hanukkah... Kwanza.... No matter which holiday you and your family celebrate, a “jolly holly” is not an assured certainty.

Many families are experiencing financial difficulties this year; others are coping with health problems, are lonely for relatives who cannot afford to travel, who are serving in the military or who may be spending the holidays with a husband's or wife's family or with a divorced parent's new family.

The traditional joys of the season are usually accompanied by the traditional stressors of the season: insufficient time, money or both; worn out traditions evolving into guilt trips, too many calories, too much cooking, decorating, shopping and entertaining; travel delays; loneliness and grief; sibling rivalry, tired children, angry spouses, cranky relatives, exhaustion.

Our annual frenzy of holiday hyperactivity reminds me of my favorite definition of insanity: that is, doing the same things over and over again and expecting a different result.

Strategies exist for getting through the season with more joy and less regret:

- ❖ ***Be flexible about spending time together.*** Do not focus all of your holiday expectations on just one day; focus instead on the entire season.
- ❖ ***Be flexible about place.*** Festivities do not have to occur at the same place year after year, or even with the same people.
- ❖ ***Gracefully accept the choices of others.*** If your children want to start new holiday traditions with their children, give them your blessing to do so.
- ❖ ***Do not compare.*** Each year and each family are different. Resist comparisons to holidays past or to other families' holiday celebrations. Cherish the people who are available; celebrate with them in special ways.
- ❖ ***Do the holiday things that you enjoy.*** Some of us like to bake, entertain and do crafts. Others enjoy reading, watching television, attending musical performances, participating in athletic activities, dressing up and going out, visiting friends. Whatever spells “holiday” best for you and for your family, arrange to do it.

- ❖ **Reduce holiday spending.** Nearly everyone has been affected by our nation's current financial crisis. Many of us have decided not to exchange gifts this year or to exchange homemade gifts or promises of future help instead.
- ❖ **Spread as much holiday joy as possible.** Regardless of loneliness or grief, contribute in some way to the upside of the season. You will feel better if you do. If means allow, do something generous for a needy person.
- ❖ **Whining and complaining are not allowed;** avoid those who do so. If avoidance is impossible, maintain a polite distance from toxic people.
- ❖ **Firmly resist pressure** to do more, spend more, eat more or drink more. If highly manipulative individuals can wear you down, arrange for backup in dealing with them. Do not let anyone lay a guilt trip on you about anything.
- ❖ **Exhaustion is not festive:** do less, rest more. Make your mental health your number one priority. Your family will truly appreciate this decision.

One of my favorite holiday memories involves attending a wonderful Christmas party at the home of an interior designer. Her house was beautifully decorated with candles, lights, garlands, distinctive holiday collectibles and gorgeous flowers and plants. I was enchanted.

Assuming that her holiday tree was on another level of the house, I asked if I could see it before leaving. "Oh" she said, "I hate Christmas trees. I never put one up."

I was astonished. It amazed me how holiday fabulous her house looked without her slavish observation of such a labor intensive tradition as rearranging heavy furniture and putting up and decorating a holiday tree.

Who would ever have thought that you could celebrate Christmas so beautifully without a proper Christmas tree?

This was the most truly liberating lesson that I ever learned about the holiday season. We probably could celebrate our holidays just as well without mindlessly observing many of our other traditions too.

This year, focus more on people and less on holiday preparations and gifts. Arrange enjoyable activities together.

Less really can be so much more.