

The Holidays: A Dreaded Chore or An Anticipated Celebration

by Sylvia W. Lee

With anticipation, we approach the holidays in different ways given our personal beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. According to Andrea Weiss, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist in private practice, “the setting up of expectations and the great disappointment in ourselves if these expectations are not met, create a great deal of stress over the holidays.”

What can we do to minimize such emotional turmoil and enjoy these special days with our families and friends? First of all, consider using the following three statements as guidelines for a less stressful holiday season:

- **Family** is the most important and meaningful part of the holiday season.
- Gifts and material things are for the moment, but caring is lasting.
- Children are often the focus of our giving. Caring for ourselves, our children, our family and friends is the best present we can give them.

Here are some other ideas to think about and incorporate into the celebration of the upcoming holidays.

Plan ahead

- Plan ahead for a maximum amount of pleasure and a minimum amount of stress.
- Be aware of your energy, money, and stamina, and spread them out through the holidays so you have some of each left.
- Cook ahead of time and freeze.
- Cut down on impulse buying by shopping when you’re not tired.
- Make arrangements to have your children cared for by a friend, provider, or relative so you can shop or have some time for yourself. Trade child care with a friend!
- Limit the time you’re out and avoid shopping during nap or meal times if you plan to shop with your children. Bring snacks for yourselves to tide you over, just in case.
- Shop by phone, mail, and catalog; make simple gifts; shop at smaller stores instead of mega malls.

Focus less on material things

- Discuss the original meaning of the holiday you’re celebrating with your children.
- Let your children know what your values are so their expectations will be realistic.
- Don’t be pressured into adopting someone else’s expectations and values as your own.
- Gift-giving can be a bottomless pit. Make a list, then reduce it by half. If you have many relatives, decide to give gifts to only one family, choice to be determined by selecting names from a bag.
- Emphasize the importance of people, not things. Don’t equate material gifts with love.

Keep things [safe](#)

- Check your decorations and wiring.
- Keep poisonous plants out of reach from young, curious hands.
- Be vigilant when visiting other's homes—not every house will be child-proofed like yours. You may even want to bring some of your own safety devices, just in case. Watch for unattended purses that may or may not be open, drinks, and small edible items such as nuts and hard candies.
- Practice extra precaution when you're cooking or making crafts.

Take care of yourself and your children

- Gather input and ideas from other family members rather than attempting to plan everything yourself.
- Understand that holidays are a stressful time because of many unusual demands, especially if you are away from your family, or if you have large family gatherings. Be aware that you may also experience [sadness and depression](#) when other family members live far away and are unable to celebrate with you.
- Rest and eat properly—the temptation is to eat fast food and sweet snacks.
- Treat yourself well and your children will be well. Accidents happen more easily when you are tired or frustrated.
- Stand firm against being a super parent. If you do half of what you planned, congratulate yourself.
- Set aside some quiet time for your family, especially if you're spending the holidays away from home. Children are easily upset when they are exposed to a different routine, new faces, and a new environment.

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