

Examining the Work of the Holidays

Whatever holidays you and your family will be celebrating this winter, and as much fun as the holidays can be, they also mean work. As the holiday season approaches, we may feel our level of stress increase as we think about all the responsibilities we add to our busy everyday schedules.

Here is a questionnaire adapted from the book, *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, by Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli. The goal of this exercise is to help you gain more realistic expectations for yourself so that you can choose to do only what is important to you—and only the things that you will have the time and energy to enjoy.

1. Look at the following list of typical holiday responsibilities and place a check by the ones you were primarily responsible for last year.

- Creating the gift list
- Shopping for gifts
- Making gifts
- Wrapping gifts
- Mailing gifts
- Buying or making cards
- Writing cards
- Driving to the post office
- Mailing cards
- Shopping for extra groceries
- Making the holiday main meal
- Baking for the holidays
- Helping out at church or synagogue
- Decorating the house
- Sewing or buying clothes
- Cleaning the house
- Making Advent preparations
- Getting the tree
- Decorating the tree
- Taking down the tree
- Putting up outside decorations
- Hosting parties
- Helping with school activities
- Planning family gatherings
- Making travel arrangements
- Packing
- Preparing for houseguests

2. Add any tasks that are not listed above.

3. Spend some time remembering how you felt last year as you were doing each of these tasks you checked. Put a star by the ones you actually enjoyed.

4. Take a piece of paper and write down the tasks from list above that you did not enjoy doing last year. Beside each one, write down a few words that describe the reason(s) for your dissatisfaction. Some common reasons are:

- Not enough time
- Not enough money
- Not enough help
- Not enough family support
- Task not enjoyable
- Find no value in task
- Performance did not measure up to expectations
- Lacked creativity

5. Now ask yourself what message you get from this second list? Are there things you did that someone else could do this year? Put his or her name by that item. Are there things you could eliminate? What about things you enjoy doing that you could share with others, with the understanding that they will share their talents with you? Try to be creative here. Sometimes a family that would enjoy sharing their holiday cookie baking extravaganza can make a happy exchange with someone who loves to make special holiday decorations. Doing something or many things differently this year may help you handle the stress of the holidays and make them more enjoyable for you.

What we all want for our holiday season (and children want this most of all!) is relaxed time with our families, realistic expectations about gifts, a natural pacing to the holidays, and reliable family traditions to fall back on when our calendars are extra full. When we realize how easy it can be to do only what we truly value, we can create joyful and enduring celebrations for our families.