

The least magical parts of the holidays

The holidays are a time of year known for joy, peace and love.

But, for some families, this season also means high credit card bills, family drama and jam-packed schedules.

That means that not all parents are feeling the peace, joy or love this holiday season. And that's okay. Here are a few things you may be experiencing this holiday season and some tips that may help. And remember, if you aren't feeling the magic, you are not alone.

When you are grieving a loss.

You decorate the tree and remember stringing popcorn with your mother. You hang the stockings and realize there's one less on the mantel than there should be.

The holidays can be a very painful time if you have lost a child, family member, friend or pet. It can be a reminder of happier times or the memories you'll miss.

Try this:

- Find a way to honor your loved ones this holiday. Purchase a special ornament, light a candle or share favorite memories around the tree.
- Ask for help. Find a counselor, friend or pastor you can talk to about your loss and work through your grief.



When you are broke as a joke.

There's no doubt that the holidays can be expensive. In addition to all the glittering gifts under the tree, there are holiday dinners, road trips and other unexpected expenses.

Try this:

- Get creative with gifts. Start a family contest to see who can create the best gifts from nothing. This can be a great family tradition your kids will remember. (Ideas include hand-made items and coupons for services like babysitting or laundry.)

now what? Keep Going.

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- Ask for help. Instead of buying groceries for the entire meal, ask each guest to bring a dish to share.

Stay close to home. Instead of spending the money to travel for the holidays, invite your friends and family to your home this year.

When you are knee-deep in family drama.

There are a lot of reasons you may be experiencing drama in your family - from past arguments to the current political environment. It can be difficult to let the bad blood go. But it's also likely that you'll be gathering around a table or a tree this year.

Try this:

- Call a truce for the holidays. Make a call or send an email and ask if you can avoid the hot topics completely.
- Be the bigger person. Want to bury the hatchet? The holidays are the perfect time to do it. Wrap a special package for someone you've hurt or felt hurt by - the small gesture may open the door for a better relationship going forward.

When your kids are all on the naughty list.

Your kids may hope that Santa has them on their nice list, but they seem to be more whiney and entitled than normal. And if you have to listen to them fight in the back seat of the car one more time, you may just lose your jingle-loving mind.

Try this:

- Give your kids a cause. Instead of making it all about them, find ways to give back to the community as a family this holiday season. Adopt a family, donate items to the food pantry, or volunteer together at a soup kitchen. This can be a great tradition - and a wonderful way to gently remind your family of your blessings. (Bonus: Your kids may also become more empathetic.)
- Ask for help. You may need a day off. If you can, drop off the kids at a sitter and spend a few hours pampering yourself - or even just sitting in silence. Consider it a gift to yourself.

When your plate is too full.

As parents, we often feel a lot of pressure to make the holidays perfect for our family. So we attend every tree lighting, find every Santa, hide all the elves, and strive for Pinterest-perfection.

The truth? That perfection doesn't exist. And our kids don't need it.

What they do need is to feel loved and safe. And we can do that without lots of unneeded stress.

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Try this:

- Instead of filling up the calendar this Christmas, try clearing time for low-key family nights at home. You can play games, watch Christmas movies or decorate the tree together. (These are great traditions your kids will remember. And these activities don't have to cost anything.)

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KEEP GOING.

While the holidays can be magical, it doesn't always feel that way. By shifting your perspective and trying some of these tips, maybe you can bring some peace, joy and love back to your family.

The truth? Your kids don't need 99 shiny packages under the tree. But they need you.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 12/20/16. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

now what? Keep Going.