

4 Tips for a Stress-free Holiday

There are less than 45 days until Christmas. Is that enough to make your hands clammy and heart beat faster?

On the horizon – Elves on the Shelves and hostess gifts and jam-packed social calendars and shopping bags full of toys.

The holiday season can be both magical and incredibly stressful. High expectations, busy schedules, tight expenses, and family dynamics can lead to an explosion of stress.

But with a little planning and patience, you can make this holiday season more merry and less exhausting. Here are four simple tips for a stress-free holiday.

Be realistic.

Many parents have unrealistic expectations of how the holidays should go. Think Norman Rockwell meets every Christmas toy commercial you see on television. Then make it better.

That's how we think the holidays will go.

But in real life, kids get sick, parents can't find the latest and greatest toy, and the turkey ends up undercooked.

So, set realistic expectations now and go easy on yourself. Not everything will be perfect, and that's okay.

Spending time with those you care about and making memories (even if the memories involve frozen pizza).



now what? Keep Going.

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Make your own traditions.

Establishing traditions is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. It shows your children you love them by establishing structure and routine.

Traditions can be as simple as hugging goodbye or tucking a child in bed at night. Or it could be an annual tradition of driving through your neighborhood with hot cocoa to view the Christmas lights. Or watching “Elf” with a bowl of popcorn. Or eating tacos on Christmas Eve.

Whatever your traditions, choose to spend time on them this holiday season instead of rushing around to do everything you think you “should.” Your time will be better spent and your stress level will decrease.

Set ground rules.

Now’s the time to decide the ground rules for your family’s holiday season – especially around time and money. These are two of the biggest stressors during Christmas (and anytime). So ask yourself the following questions:

- What really matters to me this holiday season? (Don’t spend your time or energy on things that aren’t on this list.)
- How much money can I actually spend? (Setting a budget now is a great way to keep you from a financial free-for-all. While it’s fun and easy to continue spending more and more on gifts and dinners and meals, your credit card bill in January will thank you for your discretion.)

There’s no reason you have to attend every single holiday party to which you are invited or stop at every holiday sale available in the Quad Cities. Instead of filling up your social calendar and emptying your bank account, focus on what matters.

Sometimes holiday stress comes from the outside.

- Your kids think they should get everything they pick out in the toy catalog.
- Your sister believes you should buy everyone in the family an expensive gift.
- Your aunt doesn’t understand why you can’t make her fancy Christmas Eve bash.

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Be honest and open when you are establishing the ground rules. In most cases, there's no reason to lie and you shouldn't have to apologize.

- Explain to your children that Santa doesn't have a blank checkbook and neither do you.
- Tell your sister that you simply cannot afford to give gifts to everyone and would prefer giving inexpensive gifts to kids only.
- And tell your aunt that it's a tradition to spend Christmas Eve with your kids at home.

Give back .

A final surefire way to dial back stress levels is to give back to those around you.

Make time to volunteer together as a family – it's a good reminder of what matters (and what doesn't).

Donate to causes that are near to your heart – the holidays are a great time to give a gift to the organizations that need your support.



When January 1 rolls around, we'll all look back on what the holidays are really about, and it's not the gifts or the parties or the meals.

So this Christmas, give yourself a break. As a caregiver, you feel pressure to make the season magical. But the most magical thing you could do is enjoy the time with your loved ones.

So adjust your expectations, manage the expectations of those around you, and keep going.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 11.12.14 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.