Dealing With Holiday Stress

The holidays can be stressful for many people. They can be expensive, and spending concentrated time with family members can push buttons and open old wounds. Luckily, there are many ways to take care of yourself during this often wonderful, but sometimes challenging, time.

Shopping

- Make lists and stick to them; impulse buying is a budget killer.
- Pay in cash rather than charging gifts; you will be much more aware of how much you spend.
- Start shopping weeks, even months, ahead. Some people keep lists all year long and buy their gifts during sales, saving both time and money.
- Ask people you exchange gifts with if they're interested in starting a new tradition instead. Perhaps you can make cards for each other, or CDs, or frame a favorite photo. Or you could set a price limit on the gifts you buy for each other.
- In some large families, each person buys a gift for one other person. The recipients are chosen or assigned in advance so that everyone gets a gift, and no one goes broke.
- Remember that gift giving is not—or at least shouldn't be—a contest.

Dealing With Family

- Develop some non-gift-oriented traditions with your loved ones. Take a walk together, watch a special movie every year, or have an evening where everyone plays games together.
- Take time to express your appreciation and commitment to loved ones; don't assume that they know how you feel.
- Include other family members in holiday planning and preparation.
- Delegate. If the holiday celebration is at your home, ask others to bring a salad, soft drinks, a side dish, or dessert.
- Remember that things do not have to be elaborate to be enjoyable.
- Call a truce on unfinished business. Many families have long-running arguments. Agree to focus on getting along.
- Adjust your attitude. Try to be open to as many relatives as possible. Ask them about their interests. Try to view life from their perspective.
- Avoid long visits with those who really push your buttons, if you possibly can. And if the visit gets too intense, excuse yourself and take a walk.
- Including good friends in family celebrations can help to ease tensions.
- Maintain your sense of humor, if you possibly can. Much of the conflict and stress in families is due to the large variety of personalities and opinions. Make believe you're watching a sitcom so that you can see the humor in your family's antics—and your own.
- Be realistic about your family. Let go of picture-perfect expectations. And don't have unrealistically high expectations of yourself either.

General Tips

- Be kind to yourself.
- Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take some quiet time daily.
- If you feel tension mounting, take a break, breathe deeply, and exhale slowly. It helps!
- And if things get too stressful, reach out for help. Call a friend or other loved one; the holidays are a great time to connect to others.

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Reviewed 08/12