

Happier Holidays

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Consumer Series | Family

by P. Johnson and J. Carroll*

Winter holidays receive a huge build-up. Before the jack-o-lantern loses its smile, stores are advertising sales, stringing lights, setting up displays and playing seasonal music. People talk about being in the holiday mood with all the excitement in the air.

The season brings changes for many families — people are visiting, different foods are eaten, homes take on festive looks, and bedtime schedules may be disrupted. Changes in environment and routines can cause uncertainty and stress.

Television and magazines depict the holiday season as a time when settings are perfect and everyone is happy. For some people, these images may instill the need to make this “the best holiday” or “the best time of year” ever. These commercial images do not reflect most people’s reality. When the images become expectations that aren’t met, many people experience anxiety. To make this a truly happy time of year, keep expectations at a reasonable level and set realistic goals.



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Planning

Planning is key to holiday happiness and enjoyment. Involve all family members in the process. If certain traditions, special meals, parties or travel are a part of your family holiday, make the arrangements early.

List special projects that require time and patience and work on one project at a time. It might be helpful to do the most time-consuming and unpleasant activities first. Assemble everything needed to get a project done, assign tasks to all family members, and work until it’s completed. Allow small children to get involved to experience the fun of helping. Once the project is done, clear away the clutter.

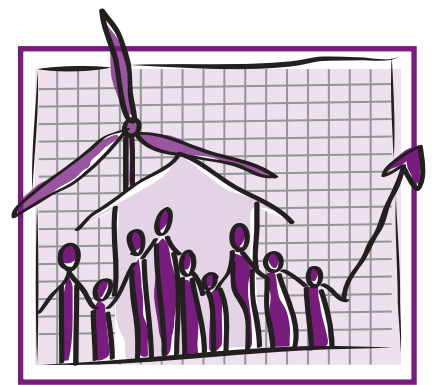
Too Much

This is the time of year when people tend to overdo to make others happy. This attitude drains time, energy and finances. People cook too much and do not have room to store leftovers. They shop for the ideal gift, yet Aunt Jamie does not remember what was given her two years ago.

Happier holidays come from sound resource management and enjoyable times spent with family and friends. This time of year, the home can become a place where families learn pleasures to carry them through all the seasons.

Use holiday shopping excursions as a time to learn about family resources. Shopping can be stressful, so start early. Do not try to remember everything. Shop with a list that has names, items, sizes, color preferences and the approximate amount to be spent. Shop when you aren’t tired. Take breaks, sit down, or have a healthy snack. Many families shop year-round for holiday presents to take advantage of sales and selection.

To avoid large crowds, shop at small, specialty stores away from large malls. Parking may be easier, there usually are fewer people, service often is more personalized, and merchandise more unique. Mail order



Quick Facts

- Holiday expectations can be reasonable.
- Advanced planning and preparation reduce holiday stress.
- Consistent routines make holidays pleasurable.
- Commercial pressures can be resisted.
- Keep plans and activities manageable to create positive feelings.
- Holiday traditions produce a balance between the expected and the unfamiliar.

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and Internet shopping are other options. Use well-known and established companies and understand return policies and procedures. Take advantage of 800 numbers to ask questions about products and company policies.

Know your financial personality and be prepared to manage holiday spending. A hoarder who worries about money will find shopping less enjoyable than the overspender or money manipulator. Watch the amount you purchase on credit. Imagine paying in April, May or June for something that has not lasted that long!

Keep the Right Focus

Do not become pressured by commercial pitches to buy, buy, buy or to give, give, give. Instead, relax and enjoy the colorful displays and merchandise for their beauty and interest.

What do the holidays mean to you? What is important to your family during this season? Do you treasure time spent with each other and friends?

This is a season to show others you care. Show your giving spirit by running an errand for an elderly neighbor, baking cookies for new parents or a student completing final exams, or volunteering to read stories in the pediatric ward of the local hospital. Have your children make useful gifts for residents in a senior facility.

Do not allow distractions to lessen safety – fasten seat belts, use car seats, choose age-appropriate toys, pick up toys, use non-combustible materials for decorations, and check smoke alarms.

To make this a happy holiday season, focus on family and not chores. Slow down and enjoy each other!