

DE-STRESSING *the* HOLIDAYS

by Shawne D. Diaz, MA, LCMHC

“There’s no place like Home for the Holidays,” this popular holiday song written by Al Stillman and first published in 1954 rings true whether it’s sung by Randy Travis, Barry Manilow or Perry Como. The holidays may be a time of joy and celebration with fond childhood memories and family traditions. Or, they may bring up memories and feelings that aren’t as happy. Then, add the stress of balancing work, holiday shopping in crowded stores, strained finances and the obligation of multiple visits on the same day due to today’s reality of blended families and you have a recipe for the holiday blues.

So, how do you avoid that? Well, you could hibernate until the season is over, but then all those great cookies would go to waste. Instead by prioritizing, setting limits, knowing your boundaries and delegating, the joy of the holidays can be yours.

Prioritize:

- Take care of yourself first. Make sure you get enough rest, eat right, exercise and take some down time. No, it isn’t being selfish it is good self-care. You maintain your car don’t you? So, why wouldn’t you maintain yourself?
- Focus on the people most important to you for gifts. If you have a large family, consider exchanging names so you don’t have to buy as many gifts.

Setting Limits:

- You don’t have to accept every holiday invitation. It is okay to say no. It is even okay to say no to family members.
- If you can’t say no, suggest spreading visits out. Instead of trying to visit everyone on the same day, perhaps you can visit one or two people on one day and then someone else the next weekend.
- When buying gifts set a budget. You don’t want to be worrying about paying for gifts months after the holidays are gone.
- Cut the holiday card list, or instead of sending cards send a newsletter, or send e-cards.
- Simplify the decorations. You don’t have to decorate every room.

Boundaries:

- Difficult family members often surface during the holidays. Co-workers may over indulge at the office party and become more critical than usual. Remember, it takes two to argue. Just like you don’t have to accept every holiday invitation you also don’t have to accept every invitation to an argument. Just be pleasant and detach yourself from the situation.

Delegate:

- Are you in charge of the holiday gathering? Let others get into the holiday spirit with you and ask them to bring their favorite dish. Or, have someone set the table for you or act as the bartender.
- People can help after the meal too, clearing the table, putting leftovers into containers, loading the dishwasher or washing dishes.
- If you have pets, ask someone to feed them or maybe walk the dog for you. You don’t have to do it all.



These are just a few ideas to help de-stress your holidays. This can be a time of peace and happiness spent with family enjoying old holiday traditions and starting new ones. All it takes is a little planning.



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