

5 Steps to Reduce Holiday Stress

Tis the season, so why aren't you jolly?

Think about the holiday season. What do you see? Fall splendor transforming into snowy landscapes? Multi-colored lights covering the city? Friend and family visits by the fireplace? Children's smiles as they see the tree with packages underneath? So why are many people overwhelmed by the "big 3" holiday stresses: financial worries, family and social demands, and loneliness?

Images we have of the holidays are crafted from expectations that each of us bring into our relationships. These expectations are a product of childhood memories, family customs, the media, and spiritual traditions. Some expectations are obvious while others are hidden. When our reality does not match what we envision for ourselves, there is disappointment, and disappointment is the major factor in holiday stress.

Underneath each type of holiday stress you'll find at least one expectation that is not being fulfilled. Ask people who you trust and will listen to help you take the following steps to decrease stress levels during the holidays.

1. **Write down** your holiday expectations and why they are important to you. Identify your most important aspects of the holidays. What do you expect to happen? Try to dig deep to understand what it is about those expectations that appeal to you. Share what you have written down with your friend or family member. *Important note:* Your listener will need to quietly suspend judgment about your revealed expectations.
2. **Prioritize** and rank which expectations are most important. Be kind when listening and discussing needs and expectations you have for others in your relationships (spouse, kids, etc.).
3. Determine which expectations are reasonable. Everyone has to live with some unmet expectations. This is easier to handle if people close to you are willing to listen and at least consider what you want.
4. If your expectations include members of your family, meet together and **brainstorm** activities that will accommodate everyone's needs and **make a plan** to include events that fulfill the needs of each person. Even activities that seem very different can serve the same needs. For example, watching football and playing board games both offer the chance to interact with friends and family. Set a date for each important event, and make sure that each person knows what their responsibilities are for each activity. These customized group activities can become treasured traditions.
5. After the holiday, discuss with your family **what worked and what needs to change** for the following year.

These five steps can help you reduce and manage holiday stress, producing a more fun and fulfilled holiday season.

For other helpful strategies, join us for an upcoming complimentary seminar titled *How To Survive The Holidays*. This seminar will cover the five steps discussed in depth and will include hands-on exercises with useful tools that will help you enjoy the holidays once again. Visit www.HealingStrides.com for more information and to register.

About the Author

Jo Ellen Christian is a nationally certified counselor and founder of Healing Strides, LLC. Her unique and inspiring Marriage Improvement Program enriches the lives of families. For more information about her programs or her upcoming Holiday Survival seminar that strengthens relationships, visit her website at www.HealingStrides.com.