



Enjoying Christmas Despite the Stresses

by ROSS FLOOD

The holiday season is a time for music, lights, gift-giving and being with family and friends. It is a time of excitement, joy and spirituality. However, for some people it can also bring many pressures: hectic schedules; financial strains; family tensions; loneliness; and unmet wishes. Each year, Christmas may take a bigger effort to find the balance between spending, gift giving, parties, family time and time for self. As we move into the holidays, some people tend to overexert themselves and the merriment can quickly become bah humbug! While preparing for the upcoming Christmas holiday, however, you may be teaching and also fretting about cleaning the house and preparing meals for visiting relatives and friends. No wonder the Christmas season has also been called the season of stress! Changing your expectations and not keeping the same activities solely for sentimental reasons can help make this a happy holiday season.

- It is important to be responsible for your own happiness during Christmas. Engage with family and friends, but let others take responsibility for their lives and emotions.
- You should decide ahead of time that holiday activities you take on is a choice you have made. You can also change your mind if things get too hectic and you or family members get overwhelmed.
- Remember that you can enjoy Christmas without giving the biggest party, or having the prettiest tree, or the best decorated house. Make it fun, not a competition.
- If you find the holidays lonely, a volunteer activity can be therapeutic. Doing is preventative medicine against depression.
- Take it one day at a time. Plan activities and don't take on the entire holiday season at once. Have quiet time for your children and always make time for yourself.
- Make a list of all the different things that you like about the holidays and, of course, the things you dislike. Do the things you enjoy and rid yourself of most of those you dislike. In other words, if it brings you grief, why are you still doing it?

- Try to provide time for family members to share the real meaning of the holidays. Do things with your children or friends you both like or let them suggest activities during Christmas.

Remember that the real meaning of Christmas is happiness, peace, joy, faith, and love. This is a joyous time of the year and these are the reasons for celebrating Christmas. You are responsible for your own feelings and actions over Christmas.

Making the Holiday Time Stress Free for Children

As the holidays approach, parents are not the only ones who feel the demands of the holidays. Along with the excitement of Santa's visit, children may also feel a rising anxiety as visitors, holiday events and marathon shopping outings disrupt their normal routines. Children are sensitive to their parents' feelings and can get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the season. Little ones are especially in danger of over-stimulation. Too much "fun" can upset children who may become grouchy and restless. Listed below are some tips that parents may use to help children enjoy the holidays:

Try keeping to a regular schedule for meals, naps and bedtime. Limit things like snacks and sugar by having fewer candies and goodies out when you don't have visitors.

Involve children in holiday preparations. Even the youngest child can put bows on gifts or cut out a sugar cookie. It makes them feel important and teaches them about family traditions.

Children can become distressed during new activities, so talk to them beforehand about visits to Santa, outings or parties.

When it becomes obvious that your child has had enough excitement, remember to have quiet activities ready like soft music, storybooks, puzzles and quiet games to play. There are computer web sites that have games, puzzles, activities, and arts for children of all ages. If you can't find a quiet spot, bundle up and go for a walk.

Are you away from home for the holidays? Cards,

phone calls, e-mail messages and Skype video can help to keep you close. Record or videotape a Christmas story for your child's bedtime story.

For children, keep it simple. Don't forget to reinforce good behaviour with lots of hugs, kisses and praise. The greatest gift you can give your child during the holiday season is your time, attention and love.

Survive Christmas Holiday Stress With a Positive Attitude

Your attitude and belief systems about the holidays greatly influence how you set your expectations. Teachers, with the time off from school, tend to have more time than most adults to engage with family, attend social activities and enjoy outdoor fun, but still may be overwhelmed with the level of activity. We offer the following suggestions to support you in having a joyful holiday.

Practice Acceptance. Instead of hesitating about participating in holiday rituals or dreading the visit of a favourite relative, accept the situation or person as they are and notice how your mood improves. Acceptance is simply acknowledging what is instead of resisting reality. Being non-judgmental can lead to a feeling of peace and calm.

Be Delighted. Looking for enchantment, joy and wonderment in everyday activities reduces stress and uplifts even the lowest moods. Enjoy a bright star filled sky, the first snow fall, or a crackling fire on a cold night. Be in the present where everything can be peaceful and joyful.

Find Forgiveness. Getting together with family and relatives during the holidays can trigger painful memories of old family wounds for many. Open your heart by finding forgiveness with past family quarrels. Forgiveness isn't about excusing behaviour; it's about accepting and freeing yourself to move from the past into the present. Planning your family's travelling and housing arrangements can ease a lot of stress with holiday visiting.

Ignite Creativity. Creativity, a childlike appreciation for things and spontaneity are wonderful antidotes to stress and feeling overwhelmed. Get your creative juices flowing through decorating, singing carols, building a snow person, or playing games with your children. Acting as a kid again can bring real joy and connect with your children and grandchildren.

Be compassionate. This time of year can be difficult for those without family and friends, the homeless, or those dealing with loss or financial hardship. Through compassion we can gain a broader perspective on life and realize we are better off than we thought. Giving to food banks, Christmas Gift Drives, helping out those with less than you can help give a

deeper meaning to Christmas.

Shift Perspectives. If driving is usually a frustrating experience, use the increased holiday traffic as a time to listen to your favourite radio station, CD or audio book. Whenever you find yourself reacting in anger, or frustration, challenge your perspective on the situation and look for new opportunities. Look for those aspects of your life that you can control or at least influence, it will reduce stress during this festive time of year.

Be Grateful. During the holiday season be grateful for what you have and share with family – the easiest way to reduce stress is with gratitude. Show appreciation for the people you love, the tangible things you have in your life, and the small and large blessings you receive. Take some time over Christmas to heal past grudges between you and some close people around you.

You can learn to thrive instead of just survive the holiday season by implementing these positive attitudes into your life. You have the power to create your own experience to enjoy!

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FUN CHRISTMAS WEB SITES - FOR BIG AND LITTLE CHILDREN

Some of these sites are commercial ones, but all have free games, puzzles, activities, and cards that children can enjoy over the holidays

- <http://robinsfyi.com/holidays/christmas/christmasfun.htm> (Free Christmas songs, arts and crafts, activities, on-line games)
- www.xmasfun.com/ (Free site with Christmas music, games, downloads, clip art and graphics, quizzes, party games, etc.)
- www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/fun/ (Free site with games, music, downloads, Christmas jokes)
- www.noelnoelnoel.com/ (Songs, family fun, traditions, recipes)
- www.northpole.com/ (Commercial site with free games, puzzles and activities)
- <http://holidays.kaboose.com/christmas/index.html> (Free site with colouring sheets, puzzles, Christmas cards)
- www.akidsheart.com/ (Free site for teachers and kids. Click on holidays, then Christmas for free games, colouring, puzzles, activities etc.)
- www.rexanne.com/xmas-kids.html (Commercial site, with free games, puzzles, art)
- www.primarygames.com/holidays/christmas/games.htm (Commercial site with free games, colouring pages, puzzles and on-line games.)
- www.stresstips.com/xmastest.htm (A humorous online Christmas stress test for adults)