

Less Stressful Holidays

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And so the holidays are upon us. It is that festive time of year where all stress vanishes into nothingness like the smoke from an extinguished Hanukkah candle. During this most magical time of year, families coalesce and unite, bonded in their unyielding, undying love for each other. Past grievances are forgotten. Harmony is ensured; never a cross word is uttered.

As we make our way further into December, we find the exhilaration of gift shopping and jam-packed, shoulder-to-shoulder, bustling crowded malls to invigorate and revive us. Weariness and fatigue evaporate as friendly masses graciously help strangers find the finest deals in the bulging department stores. Parking spaces are abundant; there is never an oversized truck taking up three slots. Drivers are courteous; traffic flows as it should.

All is as it needs to be. There is peace at hand, in one's soul and on the planet. After all, it's the holiday season.

Upon waking up, one realizes reality is somewhat different than idyllic expectation. This time of the year — despite having numerous reasons to celebrate — is known to be one of the most stressful periods on the calendar. In addition to our regular daily hectic routine we have all 11 months, there are added details to manage, such as travel, house guests, cooking — and, of course, the financial concerns of spending a great deal of money.

How does one stay calm during this period in order to truly enjoy what can be a magnificent time of year?

The key is to stay "SANE."

1) **Take care of SELF.**

Too often we forget to reserve time for what's important for us and give, give, give, and give. By day's end, we are empty vessels and collapse exhausted, unhealthy, and resentful into bed.

Don't confuse "taking care of self" with "ignoring others." This is not a mutually exclusive proposition. However, make sure to take time every day to

- Accomplish tasks you need to finish
- Give yourself some peaceful quiet,
- Make sure your health needs are met.

After all, if you don't take care of yourself, you will have nothing left to give to everyone else.

2) **ACCEPT situations for what they are.**

A great deal of turmoil and conflict arises from resentment that the holidays are not what they SHOULD be as opposed to what they are. Uncle Leo continues to espouse unpleasant opinions to anybody in earshot. Aunt Leslie and Grandma take snipes at each other. Your nephew focuses only on negatives.

All these disappointments — especially when you might be trying to squeeze a year's "family time" into a few days — can add up to sadness, frustration, anger, and stress, ruining your mood, and therefore, the holidays.



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When confronted with what you don't like in others:

- Take a deep breath
- Think of something positive about the person
- Focus on what you can do for yourself; do not try to change other people's thoughts.

3) Say NO.

Many people feel overwhelmed with guilt and shame when they have to say, "No." The result of that is they take on too much, accomplish it poorly, and take it out on others for asking them to do it.

If — after taking a few moments to connect with your feelings — you find that a relative or coworker has asked you to do something you cannot do or consider to be wrong, explain that it won't work for you because you have too many other things to do. Offer a counter suggestion or a compromise if it seems appropriate. Whatever you do, do it politely. Realize it will feel awkward to you if you are used to saying "yes" all the time. That's OK; the process of change feels awkward at first.

4) ENJOY the moments.

Although much of this article points out annoyances with the holidays, there can be a great deal to enjoy. It is important to remember that when we are overloaded, irritated, and full of activity, we don't have time to appreciate them as well as we can.

A few tips to help you enjoy the moments are:

- Smile at strangers.
- Call relatives and say you love them.
- Decorate your home and office.
- Take walks more often
- Dress for the holidays

Appreciate the niceties that do come with this time of the year. The more you do that, the less frustrating the less pleasant components will seem.

It can be sad that so much of the holidays feel like one conflict after another and we reach January feeling like we need a vacation. Remember to stay SANE during December and the new year will feel much brighter.

Special note: There is an article on my website entitled [The 3Rs: Handling Difficult People](http://www.scottqmarcus.com/articles.html#3Rs) that can be helpful in handling people's feelings when they are telling you what to do when you don't want to do it.

You can find it at <http://www.scottqmarcus.com/articles.html#3Rs>