

# LESS is MORE

## De-Stressing your Holidays

■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC

### *Is stress stealing your holiday joy?*

Holidays are intended to be joyous celebrations. And yet when we think of the holidays we tend to think of too much to do, not enough money, hectic hurry, difficult family members, feeling depleted, and so much stress. Here are some ideas on how to approach the holidays from a more relaxed and playful perspective.

#### **Meaning of the Season**

Holidays are celebrations filled with spiritual meaning remembered through traditions we share with family and friends. Ask yourself what is the core meaning of the holiday and what does it mean to you. What do you want to be mindful of and how do you want to experience it?

#### **Simplify**

Scale down what you do. Reassess your traditions and think about what is important to you and your family. Ask your family what matters to them and what can be eliminated. Some people enjoy baking but if that isn't a priority to your family give yourself permission to let it go. Christmas cards, decorating etc. can all be re-evaluated.

#### **Focus on people rather than things**

Tune in to time with loved ones rather than "doing" for the holiday. Activities shared are more important than extravagance or lots of gifts.

#### **Pitch Perfection**

Perfect holidays aren't possible! When our expectations aren't met we become disappointed. Adjust your expectations to match reality. Ask yourself what is realistic and bring your expectations of yourself and the holiday down to that level.

#### **Live in the Moment**

Be present to whatever you are doing or who you are with. Don't allow worry and stress to steal the joy of the moment.

#### **Practice good self-care and awareness**

The better you care for yourself the better you will feel which makes it easier to cope with whatever comes your

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way. Good self-care is essential all year round but even more so during the holidays or when stress increases. Pay attention to your body and be aware of thoughts and feeling. For example, let's say you are worrying about several things and feeling tired and restless. You can use this information to be kind to yourself by cutting short an activity to go home and rest, do some deep breathing or have a cup of tea. Self-awareness can help you make wise choices. Take time to de-stress. Rest, play, laugh, reflect, journal, exercise, color, do yoga, eat nutritious food, get plenty of sleep, pray and tell God your worries. Allow yourself to enjoy activities that help you relax.

*"Find rest, o my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken." Psalm 62:5&6*

### Be organized, break it up & delegate

Many holiday preparations take a good deal of time. Plan ahead and break tasks into smaller pieces. For example, make cookie dough on Friday night and bake Saturday morning. Decorate the Christmas tree over 2 or 3 days rather than spending all day on it. Assemble one day, put lights on another day and add ornaments yet another day. Delegating to other family members some of the tasks needing to be done can also lighten your load. A great website is <http://christmas.organizedhome.com>.



### Prepare for Triggers

Think about what causes you stress and prepare for it to the best of your ability. One trigger might be a difficult family member. Reducing the time you spend with them can make things more manageable.

### Be Flexible

Things seldom go exactly how we think they will, so be ready to flex with the unexpected. Keep things in perspective and look for the humor. Don't allow mistakes or mishaps to ruin your day! Ask yourself, "Will this really matter in a year?"

### Cultivate Gratitude

Choosing to be grateful helps counter the weightiness of what we struggle with. Find things to be grateful for like life itself, loved ones, a pet, the beauty of fresh fallen snow, sparkling lights, a child's giggle, etc.

Think outside the box and be creative in how you approach the holidays. Give yourself permission to make changes where you need to and keep only the traditions that are important to you and your family. Re-evaluating how you celebrate the holidays and practicing better self-care can free you up to experience more joy. You'll provide yourself the opportunity for Thanksgiving to be about giving thanks to God and Christmas a special time to adore Jesus. ■



Joy Bocanegra, MA, LCPC, is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and sees clients in our Orland Park, IL location.

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