



Tips on Creating a Peaceful Family Holiday

The most wonderful time of the year can also be the craziest. It can become the most exhausting and the most frustrating. There are practical ways to increase the peace and reduce the frustration of the holiday season.

First, define a mission for your holiday. It probably sounds odd to have a mission for your holiday, but at the least, you should have a clear vision of what is the most important part of the holidays for you. Is it being with family? Is it the festivities? Is it communicating with lifelong friends? Is it providing fun for your children? Is it connecting with neighbors? Is it the celebrating of life and light?

One of the big advantages of determining your holiday priorities is that it will allow you to see what is less important. Many holidays are ruined by the determination to cram everything good into a few days or weeks; holiday joy caves in under the pressure. It is wise to carefully decide what is most important to you and prune away those things that are less important or can be done in different ways.

Setting priorities is especially difficult if you and your partner or other family members have very different priorities. Even in such a case, it is a good opportunity to practice some understanding and synergy.

We have some good friends where the husband and wife have very different holiday priorities. The husband favors parties, food, friends, and fun. The wife favors quiet music and time with family. Rather than turn the holidays into an annual fight, they have built traditions that they both enjoy. Certain times are set aside for quiet family talking and caroling. Other times are designated for laughter, fun, and food. Because each spouse is sensitive to the other's preferences, they have carefully crafted the holiday activities to be enjoyable for both of them.

After you have defined a mission for your holidays, set limits. You may decide that taking part in some traditional gift exchanges is burdensome rather than blessed. You may decide that making homemade treats for the neighbors should be deferred for a less hectic season. You may decide that the writing of cards should be replaced with occasional calls throughout the year.

We know parents of three young children who found that they annually bought many expensive gifts for their children without being sure that their children would be happy. In fact, gifts can become an addiction for children. Every year they may get more and enjoy them less. These wise parents told their children

that a specific dollar amount of gifts is what they might expect. The children carefully edited their ambitious wish lists to the things that mattered most to them. The children appreciated their fewer gifts even more, and the parents surprised them with a few stocking-stuffer treats.

The most important tip for creating a satisfying holiday is to move from survival to significance. The most enduring holiday memories will probably come from serving someone who is lonely, visiting someone who is sad, or building a bridge to someone from whom you have become estranged. It is not enough to throw money into a pot. Lasting memories grow out of carefully chosen personal contacts. To make a truly significant holiday, be sure that love and service are written into your holiday mission. May it be joyous!