

EDITION 1

'Tis The Season



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Holiday Rest or Stress...*You Decide*

Are the holidays stress you out?

As the holiday season approaches, your stress level will probably rise. In addition to your typical schedule of work, home and kids, you've got more shopping to do, menus to plan, and food to prepare. *The good news is, even with all the extra activities and preparations, you can still reduce your holiday stress.*



HOW TO REDUCE HOLIDAY STRESS

1. **Acknowledge that everything doesn't need to be perfect.** The commercials and movies on television during the holidays really miss the mark when it comes to realistic portrayals of family holidays.
 - Accept that you can enjoy some beautiful holiday get-togethers regardless of whether something is spilled or you're having trouble locating your favorite dinner napkins.
 - Furthermore, most people will hardly notice if the pies were baked a little too long or you forgot the cranberry sauce.
2. **Start holiday planning and preparations earlier.** Can you imagine how much less stressed you'd feel if you had all your gift shopping and wrapping done in October?
 - Also, plan your holiday menus well in advance of using them. This way, you'll have the menu set and the store lists made. As the holidays get closer, review your menus and shopping lists and make any minor adjustments you want.
 - ***Spreading holiday tasks out over longer periods of time means you'll have less stress during the holiday season.***
3. **Scale down your holiday plans.** Because adults sometimes have an overly idealistic view of the holidays that springs from their childhood experiences, this strategy can be tough to do. Scaling down your plans involves

letting go of your "perfect dream" for the holidays.

4. **Take shortcuts to save time.** Figure out easier ways to do things that will provide more time for other holiday tasks and activities.
 - One good example: Rather than baking the pies, order them from a nearby restaurant that's known for its delicious baked goods.
 - When shopping, don't be afraid to select gift cards as holiday gifts. The fact is that many people prefer receiving a gift card as they can then choose exactly what they want. Gift cards are easy to shop for, satisfy nearly everyone and will cost you less in wrapping paper. Basically, gift cards are "no fuss and no muss."
5. **Choose what you want to do. *Ponder what the holidays truly mean to you and then express that meaning in your celebrations.*** Avoid getting caught up in the commercialism that has taken over the entire holiday season.

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This year make the decision to reduce your holiday stress. By shedding the urge to be perfect, beginning holiday planning earlier, scaling down expectations, and using shortcuts to save time, you'll bring your tension level way down.



THE STRESS OF DIVORCE & HOLIDAYS

HELP YOUR CHILD NAVIGATE THE HOLIDAYS AFTER DIVORCE

If this the first holiday after a divorce, it's only natural for you and your child to feel sad and lonely.

However, you can help your child overcome these feelings and still have a special holiday. Of course, after a divorce it's normal to feel a bit down or to be a little uncertain about the future.

Here are a few tips to get through the holidays with good cheer.

- **Focus**
The key to a happy holiday season is to find something else to focus on. Focus, instead, on the gift of two loving parents. Focus on what's good in your life, rather than what seems to be missing.
- **Gratitude**
You and your child may consider keeping a gratitude journal, where you reflect each day on the people and experiences of that day that you're grateful for.

- **Volunteer**
Volunteering is one of the best ways to feel better during the holidays. It keeps you from spending your free time over-thinking about things. It also helps you remember that you have a lot of things to be thankful for.
- **Environment**
Surround yourself with positive people who will encourage you to use your gifts and talents. Nurture the friendships that nurture your soul and bring out the best in you. *Be that kind of friend for others, and you'll experience a constant flow of positive energy that will fuel you toward the happiness you were born to experience.* By focusing on others and hanging around positive people, you can survive and even thrive through the holidays.

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*Even if your marriage ended differently than you'd planned, there are plenty of good things in your life that you can still appreciate. **Let today be a new beginning** and the start of the renewal you crave by changing your perspective. When you do, you'll experience a warm and memorable holiday season.*



Schools Out...Relax & Renew

Share these effective strategies with your child to help renew and focus their mind during the holiday break so they can be prepared mentally, spiritually and physically to excel when the start of the new semester:

Relaxation Practices for Younger Children

Even small children can relax and focus if you use movement and sound to make it interesting. It also helps if you provide an inspiring role model by managing stress constructively yourself.

1. **Make it fun.** Be sure to present relaxation practices as a helpful tool rather than punishment. Pay attention to your child's limits so they'll stay engaged.
2. **Keep it brief.** As little as one minute of seated meditation can be an achievement for a preschooler. Plan multiple activities so you can switch things around if your child seems to be losing interest.
3. **Breathe deep. Focusing on the breath is an excellent starting point at any age.** Ask your child to imagine filling their stomach and chest with air and then releasing it like a balloon.
4. **Play music.** *Does your child have some favorite songs? Take turns singing different parts or ask them to listen for certain notes. Close observation is a form of mindfulness.*
5. **Take a walk.** You can also meditate or appreciate your surroundings while you're moving around. trees as you can.

Relaxation Practices for Teens

With teens, you can build on the techniques designed for younger children and introduce some new lessons. **Meditation may be especially valuable during these years as many teens experience depression and anxiety.**

1. **Increase time gradually.** If they benefit from meditating, they may want to sit for an hour or more a day. Otherwise, you can suggest other ways to relax, such as yoga or working on hobbies.
2. **Share experiences.** *Listen enthusiastically to what your teen thinks about relieving stress and living mindfully. Discuss your own thoughts and feelings too.*
3. **Search for apps.** There are apps for relaxation and meditation, and many of them are free. Your teen may prefer something created for their own age group or they may be happy with a general program for adults.
4. **Sign up for classes.** If you're still looking for something more, see what's available in your neighborhood. Check events listings at your local library and other resources to find courses on meditating or gardening.

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Personal Reflection Exercises...

I cherish the holiday memories I have of my loved ones.



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Holiday memories are worth cherishing and holding onto. I have memories of my loved ones that I think about each holiday season. ***I enjoy making new memories with loved ones throughout the holidays.*** Because I know what and who matters in my life, I am able to have good holidays each and every year.

I look at all the people who are important in my life and I remember them fondly. I spend time with those who are still here with me. I pause to think highly of those who have already gone on before me. That helps keep those people fresh in my mind and heart. ***There is plenty of room for love during any holiday season.***

Each holiday, I stop to reflect on the holidays of the past. There are many good memories there. This makes me happy, and I dwell on the good memories and avoid any bad ones. The past is unchangeable, but I choose how I look at it. ***I choose to remember past joys and forget past sorrows.***

There is only room in my mind for happiness. ***I see only joyful moments when I think about past holidays.*** There was laughter and love, and I carry that feeling with me in the present and into the future. I pass my wonderful holiday memories on to the next generation, so they may have them to enjoy during their holidays.

Today, I appreciate all the wonderful holiday memories I make with loved ones.

Self-Reflection Questions:

1. What can I do to keep holiday memories of loved ones alive?
2. How can I make new memories to treasure with the older ones?
3. Are there ways I can help others to cherish their holiday memories?

BHACOUNSELING PRESENTS
The Affirmation Experiment Starting January 2019
Registration Opening Soon

Planning Your First Holiday as a Parent

As a new parent, every day holds an exciting experience. From the first time your baby clasps onto your finger, to their very first Christmas, each day adds to the wonder of being a mom or dad. Clearly, you want to make your first holiday season as a parent run as smoothly as possible. Follow the tips below to plan your first holiday as a new parent without a hitch:



- 1. Intimate or traditional?** As a new parent, it's well within your rights to want to spend your first holidays as a new family alone. If you plan to go this route, be prepared to explain to the grandparents why you're choosing to exclude them from your holiday plans this year.
 - Keep in mind that this holiday is special for others in your family, too. If you're planning to spend a holiday alone with your new family, ***consider spending a few days before the actual holiday with both sets of grandparents to satisfy their wishes.***
 - If you're being pushed into attending your parents' traditional dinner, firmly stand your ground. Be as respectful as possible, but lovingly remind your family that this holiday is about you, your spouse, and your baby making your mark as a family.
- 2. Religious differences.** Even if you're already married, cultural and religious differences can often come into play for the very first time when the baby's first holiday is near. If you and your spouse are clearly on the same page, this is much easier. However, if you believe differently, have a sit-down chat about what compromises you're both willing to make.
 - If you're aware that your family and spouse's family have differences in cultural and religious beliefs, consider incorporating both traditions into the holiday as much as you can.
- 3. Banish guilt.** You are now a parent. And, as a parent, you make the decisions as to what is considered best for your child.
 - Avoid feeling guilty for wanting to start your own holiday tradition this year. ***As a family, your own special traditions are a wonderful part of your family's story.*** If people are truly upset that you are marching to your own drum, continue to keep your focus on the bigger picture.
 - Remember that every member of your family that has children has dealt with family guilt when they attempt to start their own holiday traditions. Ask others for advice. ***You'll ease your guilt and gain support at the same time.***

Clearly, your first holiday season as a parent is important. But if it's laden with stress, it's also important to take a step back, analyze the situation, and tame the source of your stress. ***This is a time for joy, love, and family.*** And, most importantly, it's a time for snuggling with your little peanut!

Enjoy this holiday season as a new parent. After all, you only get to experience this once in a lifetime.

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