

Ease Through the Festive Season

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It's the happiest, happiest time of the year or is it? For many people Christmas, Hanukah and other December celebrations mean coming together with loved ones, spiritual renewal, celebration and traditional family foods. However, single people may feel isolated and left out. Others may spend it with extended family who create conflict, stress and anxiety. Women may be so worn out from attending to greeting cards, shopping, cleaning and preparing for *the feast* that they don't enjoy the day. Money may be sparse while expectations are abundant. Alcoholics may relapse. So might dieters. Often there is too much of too much. How do we lighten the load?

Clients of mine used to take their children to the grandparents' home each holiday regardless of the excessive alcohol, and abusive language and behaviour used there. One year it was with much courage they decided to stand their ground and create their own Christmas celebration including volunteering with the homeless. They changed their family legacy to a healthier and more upbeat experience.

Are you ready to let go of others' expectations and create a special time for you and your immediate loved ones? Put a plan in place. Make a budget and stick to it. Share the responsibility of creating the special day. Ask yourself "What and who is most important to me at this time of year?" "What are some creative ways we can celebrate?" "How can we imbue this season with meaning that reflects our values?" Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Have a pot luck celebration.
- Serve lobster and salad, instead of turkey and the trimmings. Forget dessert.
- Agree to exchange items that you either own or made (Examples: a written tribute, a recording of grandmother sharing family stories, a photo collection, task or favour coupons).
- Draw names for gifts. Friends of ours draw names and create projects that include the one gift they bought. On Christmas day they make presentations which may include a cardboard box stage, a poem or a skit.
- Purchase gifts in one stop, like a hardware or stationary store.
- Make your gift a donation to your favourite charity. Present the receiver with pamphlets describing the good works of the organization.
- Take time for a special reading, singing, playing games, tobogganing, skiing or other fun activities.
- Visit your spiritual home and spend some time in stillness.
- If on your own volunteer at a homeless shelter, join with other singles, take a treat to the police on the street or buy yourself the perfect present.
- Brainstorm with your loved ones how you might laugh, play, connect and celebrate with meaningful rituals at this time of year.

For more ways to create your own special time look at ***No More Holiday Blues*** by Wayne Dyer and ***Unplug the Christmas Machine*** by Jo Robinson and Jean Staeheli. Enjoy lightening the load while putting joy and love into the upcoming season.

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