

Sane For The Holidays

Pacing, planning and a self-assessment may be the greatest gift you give yourself this season.

BY BARBARA J. RUBIN, PSY.D.

At this time of year, families often get so frustrated that there are sometimes seemingly not enough hours in the day to get it all done. Holiday parties, gift buying and giving, family and friend get-togethers, eating and drinking to excess, not getting enough sleep, traveling by trains, planes and automobiles; all the things we "have to" get done during the winter holidays, or so we tell ourselves. Tempers can start to flare, otherwise reliable communication skills tend to be at their most tenuous, and whammy, we start to feel like the pace of life is making us a bit crazy.

Here are some tips to help you stop the craziness of winter holidays.

Pace yourself. Remember, *you* are in charge of your schedule, especially when it may feel otherwise. The truth is you get to choose which annual obligations you continue, which new events you wish to include, how many holiday parties you will attend, which events for the children will take precedence for you this year, and so on. You indeed have that control: you're the boss of the pace you keep.

Plan how you want your year-end schedule to look. Be purposeful. Sit down as a couple, or better yet, as a family, and go over which events, activities, family gatherings and vacation days you want to enjoy together this year and why? What means the most to each of you? Let everyone speak up and voice their views.

You'd be surprised how taking a moment to design your intentions will keep you from feeling obligated to go everywhere and do everything. Among other things, this helps keep the resentment at bay. That resentment often appears when we agree to what we wish we'd been able to resist. Pre-planning will give all the important players in your family the chance to say what matters to them. Getting wishes clear and prioritizing goals *in advance* will keep the stress to a minimum.

Remember the spirit of the holidays. No matter what your spiritual beliefs, see if you can at least address the sentiment of the holiday period. Take time to assess who you are as a couple and as a family, and how you've treated one another. Ask yourselves, "have I been the partner, sister, son that I've wanted to be?" "Would I want to do anything differently in the coming year?" Focus as a family and as a couple on this self-assessment. You will be amazed at the insights you will gain and, perhaps, at the changes you may want to make to be in line with your goals.

Packing your lives with things to do and places to go may not be what really nurtures you. Stop—or pause—long enough to assess if cutting out some of the prior obligations and creating more time for you as a couple and as a family may be just the ticket to re-energize you at year's end and help you focus on priorities for the new year.

Happy holidays!

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