

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS



As soon as the leaves begin to change colour we're bombarded with advertisements, magazine articles, television programs, old movies, music, and store displays telling us what our holiday experience should be – perfect. But it never is perfect and so we might feel we've failed. We may also feel that every family but ours is getting along and having a wonderful time (just look at all the smiling faces in the television ads) and that makes us resentful and sad. Maybe it's time to adjust our holiday expectations.

As the year winds down we are reminded that we should be planning for the holidays. This means that many of us are running around shopping for gifts to give a huge list of people including family, friends, coworkers, babysitters, teachers, and neighbours – never mind cleaning and decorating the house, baking, wrapping presents, and seeing friends! The list of things you need to accomplish can leave you wondering how you're ever going to get everything done in time. This time of year can also wreak havoc on your budget with the cost of gifts, treats, entertaining, travel and food, and many of us are hoping we won't begin the New Year in the red. Instead of feeling happy, joyous, and excited, you're frustrated, annoyed, resentful, and just plain tired.

Resetting your holiday expectations

To help reduce your holiday stress, and actually enjoy the season, try the following...

- **Focus on what's important¹.** What, for you, is the season about? Spending time with extended family? Creating family memories and traditions? Entertaining friends and neighbours? Helping the less fortunate? Your faith? Focus your energies on the things that are most meaningful to you.
- **Abandon perfectionism².** Trying to create the "perfect" holiday for



Managing Expectations

everyone will make you stressed and drive you crazy. No one is perfect. No family is perfect, and things can always go wrong. If you don't have time to bake your special treats for the office potluck – buy them.

- **Have fun³.** Sometimes we're so busy preparing for the holidays that we forget the things that give us joy this time of year. Whether its tickets to The Nutcracker or the symphony, dinner with old friends, or simply curling up on the sofa with the kids and watching your favourite holiday movie, make time for your own fun – it's okay to not finish everything on your to-do list.
- **Remember that you can only control your own behaviour⁴.** If a family member makes a remark that annoys you, don't take the bait. Realize that these sorts of comments say more about the person saying them than about you.
- **Ask for help⁵.** Shouldering all the responsibility can make you feel resentful and upset if you don't manage to do everything. Clearly delegate tasks and requests – and don't feel badly about asking for help, people like to feel needed and will step up to the plate.

Helping Children

It's normal for children to have unrealistic expectations. A five year-old may ask for a pony and then be upset when she doesn't get one. The problem is that many parents feel guilty for failing to meet these expectations, so they go overboard — and miss an opportunity to teach their children how to handle disappointment, a skill that they'll need as they get older.

- **Set a budget⁶.** Where appropriate, consider letting older children know how much you intend to spend this year and what gifts may be unrealistic. For some kids, you can help them understand the concept of budgeting by explaining how long it takes to earn the money to pay for things.
- **Focus on building traditions⁷.** Holiday memories are rarely about things - they're about experiences. Create your own family traditions. Involve your children in decorating the house, baking holiday treats, and planning activities. Organize a day of skating or tobogganing with your children – maybe invite cousins or friends – and then head home for some tasty hot chocolate and cookies.
- **Give to others⁸.** One way to reset expectations and focus on the true meaning of the season is to give to others less fortunate. Help your children explore different causes and then decide as a family where your time or donation will go. It can be a fun and fulfilling activity to help at the local food bank or homeless shelter. If you don't have time to volunteer you can consider making a donation to charity.

If, despite your best efforts, the holiday season has you feeling sad or overwhelmed, please contact your Employee Assistance Program for support, financial advice, counselling, and resources. We're here for you.

-
- | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Psych Central | 4. Huffington Post | 6. Mayo Clinic |
| 2. Mayo Clinic | 5. Pensacola News Journal | 7. WTOG |
| 3. Symptom Find | | 8. WTOG |



We want your questions, comments, and suggestions—lifelines@homewoodhealth.com

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

1.800.663.1142

1.866.398.9505 (**Numéro sans frais - en français**)

1.888.384.1152 (**TTY**)

604.689.1717 **International (Call Collect)**

homewoodhealth.com

© 2015 Homewood Health™



Homewood
Health | Santé