

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Tips For Keeping Control Of The Holidays

from the American Counseling Association

The holiday season is a period when lots of us feel overwhelmed by all the stress, tension and pressure it can bring. While the holidays usually hold great joy for many people, for some of us this time of year can leave us feeling overcome by the expectations that the world, and we ourselves, put upon us.

One way to reduce holiday stress is to recognize that the "ideal" holidays we are constantly bombarded with through advertising, TV shows, magazine stories, social media and more, simply aren't real. No matter how hard we try, it's pretty much impossible to have a perfect Martha Stewart or Norman Rockwell holiday.

Instead of feeling inadequate for not reaching those make believe standards, accept that you only have to do the best you can, just the amount that makes you feel comfortable, to have a holiday season you'll enjoy. You don't have to meet the expectations of others, especially when they're not real.

One place to exercise that control is with holiday events. You don't need to go to every office party or social gathering. If it's something you'll enjoy, then do it. If it's something that fills you with dread, either make an excuse not to attend, or if you feel you must go, show up, stay just a short while, and politely excuse yourself.

The same strategy can work with family events. If getting together with family members is more depressing than wonderful, find ways to minimize the exposure. If saying "no" isn't an option, consider going for just a short visit and making an effort to avoid those people who cause you problems.

And be smart about taking control if you do attend a business, social or family event. Dress appropriately so you'll feel comfortable. Don't drink or eat to excess, both bound to cause problems. Remember that holiday events are never, ever the place to tell someone you don't like exactly what you think of them.

For some people, the holidays can actually bring severe depression. If that is how the season affects you, consider seeing a professional counselor to get needed assistance.

But if your holiday issues are simply too much stress and busy times, take a step back and look at how you can control the holidays, do things at own your pace. and stop worrying about others' expectations.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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