

10 steps to a less stressful holiday

by Naomi Rand

Here's one tradition you can afford to lose: the stressed-out feeling that comes from trying to do too much in too little time. Here's how to lighten your holiday load and keep in mind what really counts. Here are some tips to help you simplify so you can get back to the spiritual heart of the holidays.

1. Ask for your family's input.

Everyone in the family has hopes and dreams for the holidays, but you can't read minds. Carole Bodger, author of *Smart Guide to Relieving Stress*, suggests that you call a family meeting. "Once the whole family is gathered, ask each person to take a moment to list his or her three favorite holiday activities. Then ask for three things they could do without. This will help you create a holiday that's guaranteed to contain at least one of everyone's favorites, along with ideas for streamlining the celebration."

2. Spend the holidays at home this year.

You have a newborn. Or a job deadline. Right now, the last thing you can deal with is the pressure of making travel plans for the busiest time of the year. "Explain to your parents, 'Mom, Dad, I would love to visit, but it would just be too much for me -- the kids are too little to travel, and I have only a few days off,'" says Dorothy Cantor, Psy.D., former head of the American Psychological Association. "Be honest.

Your relationship should be able to withstand the disappointment." Then call the kids together for a family video or audiotape and get to the post office early to mail it. Phone your parents on the first night of Hanukkah or on Christmas morning and make plans to visit during the new year.

3. Limit the optional events.

There are things you absolutely must do, such as attend your daughter's holiday recital or the preschool class party. Add to those the adult-oriented festivities and you barely have a minute to breathe. To whittle down the list, set limits. Decide in advance just how many parties or other events you can handle, and give the green light to the first four invitations to arrive. Then politely but firmly refuse the rest. "If you decide to demur, do it gracefully," says *Parents* etiquette expert Peggy Post. "Even if you don't want to go, try to sound appreciative that you've been invited."

4. Resist the urge to be Martha Stewart.

The transformation seems to take place overnight. Suddenly, every house on the block has gargantuan wreaths over the door, tapered candles twinkling in the windows, and a display of light-up choirboys on the lawn. "These days, it seems we no longer have to be just Martha Stewart," Bodger says.

"We have to be Bob Vila too. We have to bake the cookies and nail together a little holiday dollhouse."

If you feel that holiday decor is a must, make an impact simply. Buy a fake tree with prestrung lights for yearly reuse. Choose wreaths made of pinecones for a longer shelf life. And if you're committed to bringing home a six-foot spruce, drape it with a simple red ribbon and add tiny white lights and red Christmas balls. Voila -- a design statement worthy of Martha herself, with half the fuss.

5. Get choosy about Christmas cards.

"No one has to send cards if she doesn't wish to," Post advises. "It's a personal choice." Check your greeting-card pulse. If you love sending cards, there are some ways to make it more manageable.

Start by asking yourself what holiday cards mean to you. Are they your way of keeping in touch when you've been out of contact? Then you can cut down by not sending to people you see all the time. Or you might want to reverse the process and send cards only to family and close friends. Don't get caught in the reciprocity trap. "In my family, we don't get a card back from every person we send one to," Bodger points out, "and it certainly doesn't make us hate them for life." The key to making your life easier is to cross guilt off your list. If you've got

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hundreds of cards to send, consider preprinted ones.

6. Stress the spiritual.

What parents need to focus on, given that they can't do it all, is activities that create meaning and memories. So read a book that discusses the religious aspects of the holidays. Attend a religious service designed for children. Buy an extra present for a children's charity and bring the kids with you when you drop it off. Trim the tree or light the menorah and then toast the season with hot cider. And don't forget to share your own precious holiday memories with your kids.

7. Winnow the Wish list.

It's not the great American novel. It's little Joshua's letter to Santa, and he's been scribbling since June. Is he getting everything he wants? No way. Generosity may be one of the hallmarks of the season, but that doesn't mean giving free rein to materialism. Sit down with your better half and decide in advance how many presents are appropriate. If Josh is over 5, ask him to prioritize. If he still believes in Santa, explain that room on the sleigh is limited. "Kids are going to ask for everything they see on television or at their friends' houses," Cantor says. "So there has to be a reasonable limit." You may also want to take a stand on violent or sexist toys. Don't let the holiday spirit weaken your resolve. Be true to your principles -- and your budget.

8. Don't shop till you drop.

Start early. And invite a friend along. You'll have more fun, and you can stop for a snack and a chat. "Give yourself frequent breaks while shopping," suggests Jeff Davidson, author of *The Joy of Simple Living*. "It's not a marathon. Stop and enjoy the seasonal decor. There is absolutely no reason to make shopping for loved ones anything but a joyful experience." Make things easy for yourself. If the gift wrapping is free and the lines aren't too long, take advantage of the service.

Area Inservices

Grandparents as Parents

- 1st Wednesday of each month (December 5), 9 a.m., at 3609 Mishawaka Ave., South Bend.
 - 3rd Monday of each month (December 17), 6:30 p.m., at Living Stones Church, 718 East Don Moyer Ave, South Bend.
 - 2nd Monday of each month (December 10), 6:30 p.m., at Pike Lake Park Apartments, Warsaw.
- For more info, call (574) 232-6890.

Support Groups

- **Elkhart County** contact Jody Richards at (574) 533-1234, ext. 218.
- **St. Joseph County** group meets the 1st Thursday of each month. Contact Tom & Linda Cleveland at (574) 232-3404.
- **Marshall/Starke County** meets 3rd Monday every other month at the Plymouth Library. Contact Melissa Bachtel at (574) 935-3052.

Practical parenting through Family Services

Classes held seven consecutive Tuesdays from 6:30–8:00 p.m. \$50 class fee per person or \$80 per couple. Call (574) 295-6596, ext. 119 to register.

Parenting Classes through CAPS—Child and Parent Services

Evening classes January 24–March 20. Morning classes January 30–March 26. Call (574) 522-1998, ext. 59 to register.

The Happiest Baby on the Block

Dr. Harvey Karp's classes will help new parents learn step-by-step how to help babies sleep longer and how to soothe even the fussiest infant in minutes. Offered at these locations:

- Elkhart General Hospital, November 29, January 27, February 26, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Call (574) 522-2590 to register.
- Goshen General Hospital, November 26, December 17, 6:00-8:30 p.m. Call (877) 846-4447 to register.
- First Presbyterian Church, December 8. Call (574) 522-2590 to register.

All classes are \$25 for one person or \$35 for two. Participants receive a Parent Kit which includes *The Happiest Baby on the Block* DVD and *Soothing Sounds* CD.

9. Hire some of Santa's helpers.

"Ask your local supermarket about holiday platters, catering for dinner parties, and home deliveries," Davidson says. And don't be shy. "When guests ask what they can bring," he advises, "tell them." Pay a helpful teen to assist you in the kitchen, and consider hiring a cleaning service so you're not left scrubbing the bathroom tiles the night before. That way, you can truly relax. It happens only once a year, and the extra expense will be well worth it. The bottom line here? Do whatever you can to make your life easier.

10. Give yourself a time-out.

Right now, before you have a

nervous breakdown. Stop roasting those chestnuts. Stop burning that midnight menorah oil. And don't even think about answering the phone. "Give a gift to yourself -- and not just the kind that you wrap with a bow," Bodger says. "Take an invigorating walk or spring for a sitter and take an afternoon off. You'll appreciate it, and so will your kids. There's a good reason why flight attendants advise us to place the oxygen mask on ourselves first, before we help others. If we're not okay, there's no way we can take care of anyone else."

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Reservations for the following training sessions can be made by calling (574) 533-1234 or 800-282-0809, ext. 754. Classes may be cancelled if not enough persons register. Alternative training is available through books, audio and video. A web site at www.fosterparents.com lists approved foster parent trainings. For a list of pre-approved materials as well as the training verification form, go to www.oaklawn.org, click on Services and Programs, then Services for Children and Adolescents, then Collaborative Programs. Look for Traditional Foster Care to find the forms. Remember, traditional homes can receive up to four hours and special needs or therapeutic homes can receive up to eight training hours annually through books, audio, video or internet. Certification of the training hours are dependent upon approval from the training coordinator. Please note that child care is NOT provided during trainings.

Preservice

Required training: 20 hours for a regular foster parent license or 26 hours for adoptive parents. Day one of each training series must be taken first.

Elkhart

November 17, December 1, 8, 15
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Dec. 15 will end at 5:00, after CPR

January 19, 26, February 2, 9
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Feb. 9 will end at 5:00, after CPR

St. Joseph County

January 5, 12, 19, 26
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Jan. 26 will end at 2:00 after 1st Aid

First Aid & Safety

Meets criteria for certification and State requirements for Foster Parents. CPR—due before certification expires; First Aid—due every three years; Universal Precautions due at each relicensure.

Universal Precautions/ Bloodborne Pathogens

- Saturday, December 1, 11:15–11:45 a.m., Kern Road Mennonite Church

Inservice training locations:

St. Joseph County:
Please note location with each event

Elkhart Co. Dept. of Child Services
347 West Lusher Ave.
Elkhart, IN

- Saturday, December 15, 11:15 – 11:45 a.m., Elkhart
- Saturday, January 26, 11:45 a.m.–12:15 p.m., St. Joseph Co.
- Saturday, February 9, 11:15 – 11:45 a.m., Elkhart

First Aid (immediately following Universal Precautions training)

- Saturday, December 1, Kern Road Mennonite Church
- Saturday, December 15, Elkhart
- Saturday, January 26, St. Joseph Co.
- Saturday, February 9, Elkhart

CPR

- Tuesday, December 4, 6:00–10:00 p.m., Juvenile Justice Center, 1000 S. Michigan St., South Bend
- Saturday, December 15, 1:30–5:30 p.m., Elkhart
- Saturday, February 2, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., St. Joseph County
- Saturday, February 9, 2:00–5:00 p.m., Elkhart

Inservice classes

10–20 hours of training required each year. **Classes are 6:00–9:00 p.m. unless otherwise specified.**

Pre-adoption/Permanency, Part I & II

Monday & Wednesday, November 26 & 28, Elkhart (last one for year)
Saturday, January 12, Mishawaka Library, 209 Lincolnway East, Mishawaka
Information on adoption subsidies and post adoption. Required of adoptive parents.

Handbook Training

Cancelled until a new handbook is published.

Sherry Baby (movie/discussion)

Monday, December 10, South Bend, Juvenile Justice Center, 1000 S. Michigan St.

View the movie *Sherry Baby* and discuss content. (This movie is on the alternative training list. If you have already received alternative training hours, you will not be able to receive additional hours for this event.)

Family Involvement Fund (FIF)

Foster parents of children with disabilities are eligible to receive financial support through the Family Involvement Fund for actual expenses to participate in conferences, training events, and other activities. Funding limits may change, but are currently up to \$250 per person, per program year and up to \$500 per family. The application must be received at least 30 days prior to the first day of the event. For more info, contact Cathy Beard at 1-800-825-4733 or via email at fif@indiana.edu.

Coordinator's Corner

Cindi Schnitz, B.A.
Foster Parent Training Coordinator



Cindi Schnitz

Hello foster parents! As I write this newsletter I am trying to tie up year-end training and schedule training for the New Year. You may have noticed there aren't many trainings in December, but several new trainings will appear in January. I would like to hear from you... what do you want to learn about in your trainings?

Lately, attendance at foster care trainings seems to be a little lower

than average and I really want to offer trainings foster parents can use and implement with the foster children in their care.

If you need training hours, consider attending a support group in your county in November and December. Also, try to obtain your training hours throughout the year instead of waiting until the last minute to schedule your 10 hours of training needed annually.

Please call, email or drop me a line to give me your thoughts on new training opportunities for foster parents.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of some important items:

- Check your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure they are in working condition.
- Check your fire extinguishers to make sure the hose isn't rotted and the gauge reads charged.

- Make sure your new foster children are aware of what they should do in case of fire or tornado. Advise them of where to meet outside of the home in case of a fire and how to escape from their bedroom if they can't use the door. Practice tornado awareness as well, where to meet and what to do.

Have a great Thanksgiving!

Foster Parent Network-News is published monthly for foster families and the professionals who relate to them.

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