



Marriage Matters

Surviving the Holidays

How do you feel during the holidays? Do you begin with holiday decorations before Thanksgiving? For some people the anticipation of the holidays makes them feel physically ill, their stomach churns and their back and neck tighten. People who try to have the *perfect* holiday are more likely to feel stressed.

Letting go of *perfection and expectations* are the two keys to relieving stress for the holidays. Everything about the holidays is not magical and like everything else in life will not be perfect. Expecting that everything will magically go smoothly during this time period is not a realistic expectation. Perfection and expectations for the holidays can be realistic by having a discussion with family members and your partner.

♥ Expectations

Communicating with your partner may help you to understand what your expectations are for the holidays. A lot of the things that people do during the holidays are things that society may expect of them and not necessarily their partner. Talk to your partner. Discuss with them what they would *like* to happen during the holiday, what they are willing to *do and help with* and what can be *let go*.

Be sure to talk about finances. Do you *need* (not just want) lots of gifts or pricey gifts? What can you afford with your current budget? Knowing your spending limit and setting a budget is a good way to set clear expectations and reduce stress. Set clear and practical expectations that fit with your needs and budget.

♥ Perfection

The holidays will not make an imperfect relationship perfect. If you and your partner are having difficulties they will not go away just because it is a holiday. Unpleasant memories from previous years will also resurface. What can you do? Tuning out all of the hype and discussing ideas with your partner will ease the stress level.

People should not have to put their lives on pause or totally rearrange their schedules because of the holidays. Discuss time management ideas and scheduling with your partner. Committing to parties on the same night at two different locations is not always the best plan. Discuss with your partner why each party is important to the other and agree on what party to attend *or not attend*. The key to reducing stress with your partner is being willing to listen to each others needs, open to compromise, and supportive of the decision you make together.

ACTIVITY



To survive the holidays, follow these tips from J. Vincent Peterson and Janette Shaw of Indiana University South Bend:

BE NATURAL

- B** - Breathe deeply: it will help increase energy levels.
- E** - Exercise: 20 minutes, three times a week
- N** - Nutrition: Eat 3 well-balanced meals each day.
- A** - Attitude: Negative attitudes are contagious and destructive. See the glass half full.
- T** - Time management: Set priorities and do not take on more than you can handle.
- U** - Uniqueness: Recognize and treasure your own uniqueness. Say no when necessary.
- R** - Relaxation: Make private time to read or listen to music - a time not to focus on the next thing to do.
- A** - Associations: Connect with others who support you.
- L** - Laughter: Still the best medicine.

As a couple, discuss how well you follow these tips. What areas can you improve in? How can you use these tips to manage the holidays as a couple?



Care for self



Choose



Know



Care



Share



Manage



Connect

This resource supports the following principles of healthy relationships. For more resources, visit www.gafamilies.org and www.nermen.org.