



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP

Surviving Holiday Stress

This brief Parent Tip is provided at no cost by United Services for Effective Parenting–Ohio, Inc. as a tool to assist parents, teachers, grandparents and all who help to care for and to raise our children. For more information on this and other tools from USEP–OHIO refer to the conclusion of this Parent Tip.

The holiday trifecta, Thanksgiving, Christmas (for some of us, Hanukkah for others) and New Years is upon us. Oh Joy! Parents have told me, “Yes, write another parent tip on stress!” We all seem to feel it, and we are not alone with the challenges of finding joy among the stressors.

A Prevention Magazine/Dateline NBC Survey reports that most people feel nervous, stressed, and have family conflict during the holidays. They worry about money, feel over-committed, take on too much responsibility, and feel pressured to do things they don’t really want to do.

The gap between what we hope the season will be like versus how it turns out, is usually caused by our high expectations of the season. We hope for Christmas trees and Hanukkah festivities, laughter, generosity, giving, beautiful music, candlelight services, family gatherings, cookies and eggnog, togetherness, surprises, fun, love, memories and peace on earth and in the family.

Our images may not include what we might also receive – exhaustion, busyness, loneliness, depression, guilt, regrets, debt, family conflicts, painful memories, grief and separation from loved ones. This gap between our hopes and reality is often increased by the focus on activity rather than reflection. Winter weather can also bring us down. For some people feelings of depression (seasonal affective disorder – SAD) intensified by the short, dark days keep us from experiencing “the most wonderful time of the year”. Poor boundaries – A combination of not knowing our limits and not

allowing ourselves to say “NO” can complicate an already frenetic season. Family issues and poor communication, lack of forgiveness and resurfacing of old grudges can cause new conflicts. Yikes!

Losses like divorce, illness, death or the anniversary of a loss sometimes surprise us with the intense feelings they provoke during the holidays.

So how can we manage the gap between the good feelings and the frustrations?

- Set reasonable expectations.
- Give yourself permission. Ask for help and take it when offered.
- Don't ignore your grief, dive in and feel it, then set it aside for later.
- Enjoy the good things. Avoid “grinchiness”.
- Make good choices – sleep, eat well, and exercise.
- Seek quiet and peace. Find ways to give to those who are in need, and savor the satisfaction.

Reflect – Listen for the gentle whisper of the season by reflecting on your faith, your feelings of abundance and the simple joys of family, friends and the beauty of the world around you.

We invite you to share this USEP–OHIO publication with other parents, students and professionals at home or work. You have permission to copy Tips as written, send on as email, or print for a newsletter or handout. Email usepohio@usepohio.com or call 1-800-262-4KIDS to add email addresses to our list, to give us feedback about how the information works for you, or for other topics, publications and programs. Cmckay29