



# **HOLIDAY MEMORIES**

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THE STRESS-FREE WAY

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**A**s the year winds down, you might find yourself feeling all wound up about the approaching holiday season. However, ***developing skills and knowledge to enjoy peace and joy during the holidays is within your reach.***

You can successfully create special experiences and memories during this time without having to deal with an overload of stress.

Firstly, consider continuing old traditions that are near and dear to your heart. Then, be flexible enough to start some of your own family traditions. Learn to simplify your holidays. Use imagination when it comes to gift-giving to enhance the experience for everyone.

Do what's necessary to avoid overspending. Find ways to decrease family tensions among extended family members. Finally, take advantage of some wholesome holiday travel tips to help you engage in stress-less travel. Your holidays can be beautiful and fulfilling.

## 1. UPHOLDING OLD HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

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Reflect on your own family's holiday traditions and all the ways your family celebrates together. Consider these examples of holiday traditions that occur every year in the same way for many families:

- ▶ Preparing turkey, dressing, and all the fixings for a special holiday meal.

- ▶ Baking cut-out cookies in holiday shapes decorated with colored icings.
- ▶ Opening presents early in the morning on Christmas Day.
- ▶ Watching a Christmas movie together as a family on Christmas Eve.
- ▶ Lighting candles during Hanukkah season.
- ▶ Giving wrapped gifts to one another.
- ▶ Playing the dreidel game as a family.
- ▶ Making holiday treats like spiced nuts and fruitcake for friends and family.
- ▶ Leaving a tray with cookies and milk for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve before bedtime.
- ▶ Consuming special fried treats, such as latkes and sufganiyot, to celebrate the holiday.

Many people, perhaps yourself included, find themselves repeating the exact same traditions their family of origin took part in to celebrate the holidays. You might think that carrying on your family's holiday traditions is important to instill cherished memories for your own kids.

Plus, you may look forward to and enjoy upholding and carrying out all those same activities and events each year as the holiday season rolls around. After all, it's tradition.

***As you recall your traditional ways of celebrating the holidays, consider which traditions you found to be the most special and enjoyable for you.***

For example, you might have had great fun as a child and even as a teen getting the tray of cookies and milk ready to leave for Santa the night before Christmas.

You want your own children to take part in that activity, too. So, you make this event part of your own family's holiday celebrations. You could even feel nostalgia about what your holidays were like as a child.

Maybe Christmas morning had some of the best times of your life growing up and you want to try to replicate those same wonderful feelings for your own children.

Whatever the case, repeating your mom and dad's holiday traditions in your own home is pretty common. However, don't be surprised if you find yourself tweaking

Your own celebrations here and there to make them your own. That's okay, too! The holidays are about enjoyment and a sense of specialness. But what if you find yourself wanting to "go rogue" and create your own traditions?

*"It's like your children talking about holidays,  
you find they have a quite different memory of it from you.  
Perhaps everything is not how it is, but how it's remembered."*

**-Denis Norden**

## 2. MAKING NEW TRADITIONS

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The holidays bring forth a wealth of feelings, activities, and tasks. Maybe you find some of your parents' traditions to be time-consuming or even a little silly. Have you considered that you can still have wonderful end-of-the-year celebrations, even if you don't do things exactly the same way Mom and Dad did?

If it seems like each year you feel more stressed out, overbooked with festivities, and overloaded with tasks, you might be ready to establish some of your own holiday traditions.

**The following strategies will help you create new holiday traditions to fit your family:**

1. **Give yourself permission to let go of old traditions.** Tell yourself that, although you remain loyal to your family, you don't have to remain loyal to traditions during the holidays that you actually don't prefer. It really is okay to not carry out every single tradition as your family did.
2. **Ask yourself what you really want to do. *Embrace the freedom of being an adult and having choices in life.*** You can do anything you want to do for the holidays. Instead of having people over for dinner, maybe you'd really prefer to do a brunch in a private room at your favorite

restaurant. If that's what you want, then plan it and do it.

- ▶ Look at it this way: you'll have your own tradition and you and your loved ones will really look forward to it. After all, it's a bit different for this time of year. People will likely find new traditions you establish to be refreshing and a nice change.

3. **Talk with your spouse and kids.** Ask them what parts of the holiday celebrations they really like. Maybe they have their own ideas for what they'd like to do. ***Creating a new wonderful way of sharing the holidays together will deepen your family relationships.***
4. **Poll your friends and neighbors.** You can access a wealth of information about varying traditions and celebrations just by listening to how your friends and neighbors fete the holidays. Maybe one of your co-workers shares how she and her family members draw names of people to buy gifts for to avoid overspending at Christmas time (see Chapter 4).
  - ▶ A neighbor might have a wonderful tradition of gathering together on the eve of the holiday to talk about what each person wants to accomplish the following year. You might hear about a tradition you'd like to enjoy at home with your own family.
5. **Make it interesting.** Rather than getting together at your parents' home on the morning of a holiday, why not invite your parents out for dinner the night before? No one has to cook and everyone's holiday is freed up

the next day if you get together in a restaurant the prior evening.

- ▶ Or maybe instead of the traditional dinner of ham and sweet potatoes, you'll cook up an ethnic meal, like Italian, German, or Mexican this holiday. Why not? You'd be surprised at how refreshing it is for friends and family who've eaten 2 or 3 meals of the same type of foods to arrive to a cultural dining experience that's unexpected this time of year.

6. **Call your friends who have skills.** Let's say your friend, Sally, just loves to go shopping and wants to be a personal shopper. Talk to her about how she might assist you with completing holiday shopping duties. Or maybe your neighbor, Francine, makes the most delicious pound cake ever. Tell her you'll pay her to bake two of them for you.

- ▶ Maybe a co-worker prides herself on the pies she bakes. If she's willing to sell a couple of them, you'll both be happy!

Embrace the concept of forming new holiday traditions to fit your lifestyle, budget, and family's needs. Allow yourself to let go of old ways of celebrating. Figure out how you want to celebrate and get your family's input.

Ask others about their holiday traditions and vow to make yours interesting to all. Finally, tap into the skills of others to help you form new, enduring traditions.



*"Holidays are about experiences and people,  
and tuning into what you feel like doing at that moment.*

*Enjoy not having to look at a watch."*

**-Evelyn Glennie**

### 3. SIMPLIFY

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You're probably like everyone else at holiday season: you have a long "things to do" list and a clock that seems to speed up faster and faster as the holidays approach.

How will you get everything done? ***The answer is both easy and complex: simplify.*** When you take steps to simplify your holiday demands, you'll discover how much you really do love the season.

**These strategies will provide you with plenty of inspiration on how you can avoid a hectic schedule, serve easy, delicious meals, and throw some lovely get-togethers:**

1. **Let go of your wish for the perfect holidays.** We all see on TV how every holiday is picture-perfect. Reality, however, tells a much different story. Make it a goal to no longer seek perfection in your holiday preparations. Celebrating pleasing holidays doesn't require a perfect house, faultless appearance, an especially awesome party, or complicated meals.
2. **Plan ahead.** Everything goes better with some planning. Keep a short list of what you would like to do for an event. It might have entries like, "Clean living room, kitchen, and downstairs bathroom, order sandwiches from Chez Louie's, get chips, soda, and paper plates and napkins at the store, get haircut on Friday the 15<sup>th</sup>."
3. **Set limits.** Maybe it's just too chaotic to have friends over for a party on Thursday evening, then work all day Friday, do grocery-shopping on Friday night, cook on Saturday morning and early afternoon, and have your family's get-together on Saturday night. Why not decide to schedule celebrations so you have at least 3-4 days between them?
  - ▶ You'll have a day to "breathe" after completing an event, followed by a day to shop, then a day to prepare foods and clean the house. Then, on party day, all you'll do is prepare foods unable to be made ahead. Set limits however you can. Try scheduling just one get-together a week or limit the number of hours you'll entertain (like 6 to 8 p.m.).

4. **Consider pre-made meals.** Instead of preparing the turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, green bean casserole, rolls, and pumpkin pies from scratch, contact your local deli or grocer. It's common for delis in larger grocery stores to provide complete, cooked Thanksgiving or other delicious holiday dinners for very affordable prices.
  - ▶ When you tally what you spend for all the ingredients and the hours and energy it takes to cook your meal, you'll be thrilled to get a complete, cooked meal to simplify your dinner prep. At home, place the pre-made foods in your favorite serving dishes. Everyone will enjoy the meal. Plus, ***you'll be thrilled with how relaxed and full of energy you'll be.***
5. **Ask for help.** Maybe you're usually pressed for time to wrap your kids' gifts, but your mom lives alone and doesn't have much to do. Why not ask her to come and spend a Saturday afternoon wrapping your gifts while you're baking the pies? It would be wonderful to create this new tradition of spending an afternoon with your mom doing holiday tasks together.
  - ▶ When it comes to your holiday meal, consider having a potluck. Ask attendees to prepare a single dish to bring to complete the dinner. It's pretty easy to plan this type of event. Make your list of foods (or categories of foods) you want to serve. Then, contact each invitee and share that you're trying something new this year—a potluck celebration!

6. **Hire a caterer.** If you have the financial means to do so, consider having someone who's in it for the money to prepare your meal or party foods. Look at it this way, it's your contribution to that person's holiday season to give her your holiday business. Plus, you might be surprised at what you can obtain for the money and less stress.
  - ▶ Save back a couple of hundred bucks to pay someone else to do the cooking one year, just to see how it goes. Maybe one of your traditions will be that every other year, you hire a caterer for your holiday festivities.
7. **Take advantage of shortcuts available to you.** Perhaps you really want to keep the tradition of serving the holiday-shaped cookies but you don't want to make them this year. Check out local independent bakeries to see what they've got. Also, you can see what the bakery in your grocery store has in the way of cut-out sugar cookies.
  - ▶ Another great shortcut is to avoid obsessing about what to buy people. Email or call them and ask them to give you 3 ideas for gifts under \$25 (or whatever your limit is) they'd like to have. Most people love to tell you what they want.
8. **Simplify your holiday parties.** If people look forward to your holiday party every year, work hard to make it as easy on you as possible. Hire someone to clean your house the day before the party. Find a caterer to prepare the foods. Purchase a red tablecloth, dark green napkins, and set

out your white plates. These can all be used year after year.

- ▶ Finally, do no decorating other than your Christmas tree. If you must give a gift, buy an assortment of holiday decorations (candles, tree ornaments, and the like) and wrap them up, placing a gift on each chair. You'll be all set with less stress than usual. That's a tradition worth repeating.

***Making efforts to simplify your holiday celebrations can only enhance your feelings of joy, peace, and love toward others.***

Practice these simple suggestions to simplify your holiday festivities and ultimately strengthen your family's holiday traditions.

*"Holidays in general breed unrealistic expectations.  
The minute you start wondering, 'is it going to be  
wonderful enough,' it never will be."*

***-Pepper Schwartz***

## 4. GIFT-GIVING

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One of the most joyous aspects of the holidays is exchanging gifts with the people you love, admire, and work with. Yet shopping for gifts can be frustrating and even anxiety-provoking during a season that's packed with jobs to complete. We all want to get special gifts for our loved ones and see the excitement they feel whenever they open the package.

With just a few adjustments to your gift-giving tradition, you can make the experiences of shopping and giving more rewarding and fun.

### Consider these suggestions:

1. **Make a list of who you plan to give a gift to.** It's just easier to have a quick list to refer to, whether it's on your smartphone, electronic tablet, or written in a spiral notebook you carry with you. The earlier you make your list, the better.
2. **Consider your budget.** How much money will you spend on holiday gift-giving? And how much will you spend per gift or person? ***Set these amounts in advance*** to ensure you don't break the bank due to holiday spending. In ideal circumstances, set aside money all year that will be available to you when you're ready to start shopping. (See Ch. 5).

3. **Start shopping early.** The earlier you start shopping, the less you'll be stressed about last-minute holiday issues. Plus, you'll have more time to get packages wrapped and labeled. If you like, buy one gift per month and place it in a "gift drawer" in your bedroom chest. By the time the holidays arrive, your drawer will be packed with gifts ready to give. Ensure you write on each gift who they're for so you won't get confused about what you got for whom.
4. **Keep notes.** If you see an ad about a toy you'd like to get for your niece, jot it down on your list. If your co-worker tells you about a cost-saving jewelry store, ask her for the location and jot it down to shop at reduced prices. If your brother says he'd love to have the new CD by a favored music group, make a note of what he said.
  - ▶ If you've got a Smartphone with a voice recorder, you can simply speak the info into your phone to listen to later. These notes will help you buy gifts that people want and could even save you money.
5. **Ask those on your gift list to give you 2-3 ideas for gifts they want.** As mentioned in Chapter 3, send emails and ask for a response within 1 week. Then, copy and paste their lists and names onto one sheet to print before you go shopping. Set a limit of how much you'll be spending. Simply state in the email, "Please send 3 gift ideas for under \$25."
6. **If money's an issue, give gifts of homemade food items.** Nothing is more appreciated during the holiday season than a lovely plate of

cookies or a decorative bag filled with homemade peanut brittle, peppermint bark, or caramels. Decide who and how many you'll give gifts of food to. Then, decide how you'll package the gifts.

- ▶ Next, shop for holiday containers, plastic plates, or decorative bags. Decide what to make and how much to give each person. Pull your recipe(s) and make your shopping list of ingredients. Schedule a whole day to prepare the goodies. You'll enjoy giving a homemade gift of love. Giving homemade food is a lovely holiday tradition to establish.

7. **Consider giving gift cards.** Although you might not enjoy the experience of buying gift cards as much as you do shopping for hours and ending up with sore feet, nearly everyone appreciates a gift card. A gift card is the closest thing to cash you'll ever give. Even with gift cards, you can establish a nice tradition for the holidays.

- ▶ Consider each person's interests and lifestyle to help you decide which type of gift card to buy. For example, if your niece is wild about her iPhone, get her an iTunes card. If your brother loves to shop in sporting goods stores, then a gift card from stores like Sports Authority, Dick's Sporting Goods, or Bass Pro Shops will fill the bill.
- ▶ Help your mother or sister avoid cooking a meal and doing clean-up by giving restaurant gift cards like Darden's, Cheesecake Factory, or Outback Steakhouse. A Toys 'R Us card works for the kids on your list.



- ▶ If you feel less than fulfilled about handing over a gift card, why not make a batch of cookies, bag them in decorative bags, and tape or tie an envelope with the gift card in it onto the package. Now that's a tradition your loved ones will love!

Gift-giving is one of the most cherished holiday traditions. You can better enjoy the process if you have a gift list, take care with your budget, shop early, keep helpful notes, ask for gift ideas, and consider giving gift cards to reduce your gift-shopping stress. Your holiday celebrations can be nearly stress-free when you follow these strategies for gift-giving.

*"Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts."*

***-Janice Maeditere***

## 5. AVOID OVERSPENDING

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The holidays often bring fear to the hearts of men and women alike. After all, if there's ever a time of year when you blow your budget, it's the holidays. But think how much more you'd enjoy the holidays if you could

pull the whole thing off without overspending. The sooner you start getting financially prepared for the holidays, the more money you'll save.

**Here are a few tips on how you can avoid overspending:**

1. **Establish limits on how much you'll spend.** If you've got \$500 for gifts, then ensure you don't spend more. Also, set individual limits for gifts. Let's say you have two kids. Set a limit of \$100 each. You're left with \$300 for remaining gift recipients like your parents, a co-worker, 2 friends, and the relative whose name you drew in the family name drawing.
2. **Speaking of name-drawing, suggest it to your extended family.** Buying for all extended family members can cause financial stress. Talk to your brothers and sisters about instituting a "Secret Santa" name-drawing system.
  - ▶ Such a system ensures everyone has a package to open at the get-together and that no one is burdened with buying 15-20 presents for extended family members yearly. Draw names at Thanksgiving to allow time to shop for the person whose name was drawn.
3. **Whittle your gift list.** You no doubt have people on your list you hardly have contact with all year. It's okay to cross people off your list. If you feel you must keep some people on your gift list even though you don't see them much, how about giving them some homemade cookies or candy to

respect your budget?

4. **Reduce the amount you spend for gifts and only shop sales.** If you used to spend \$25 per gift, consider reducing your amount spent per person to \$20. If you're vigilant about shopping the sales only, both online and in the stores, you'll likely still be able to buy an item worth \$25 for just \$20.
5. **Refrain from using your credit cards for holiday purchases.** If you've set aside \$500, draw the cash out of the bank and place it in a special envelope in your purse or wallet. Then use that money only when purchasing gifts. No credit card use equals no debts to pay after the holidays.
6. **Give homemade gifts of food.** Others will feel your love through a gift of special treats you took the time to make yourself. Plus, you'll save a good bit of cash by making up a couple of large batches of your peanut brittle or other snacks for gifts.
7. **Shop all year for holiday gifts.** Shopping year round means you won't feel as overwhelmed with budgeting needed dollars in a couple of short months. Stock your gift drawer with items purchased at drastic mark-downs (or at after-holiday sales) for the next holiday. It'll make life much easier and save a sleigh-load of cash.

Setting spending limits, using name-drawing, cutting the gift list, reducing what you spend, avoiding credit card use, giving homemade gifts, and shopping all year for gifts at sale pricing will help you avoid overspending during the holiday season.

***Build strong, loving traditions over the years that reflect the true reasons for the season rather than how much money you spent.***

*“The holidays are also a time when people freak out about their finances. If you don’t want to spend the money, why not try some of the other options instead of killing a bunch of animals?”*

***-Christina Applegate***

## 6. LESSENING EXTENDED FAMILY TENSIONS

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It’s such a joy to experience fun and positive holidays. Yet, we all have one or two holiday “traditions” that aren’t so much fun, like family members who

just can't seem to get along. Getting family members together means there could be tensions among some members who rarely see one another.

Your family might have one or two long-standing situations involving two people who seem to mix like oil and water. You might even find yourself dreading your extended holiday get-together just because you know what's going to happen: your brother, Mike, and your cousin, Eddy, will get into it about something.

What can realistically be done to reduce these family tensions so that everyone gets through the holiday unscathed?

**Try these strategies to reduce tensions between family members during your festivities:**

1. **Use decorative place cards to assign seats.** If the group is large enough, you might be able to place some distance between the two who don't get along well.
2. **Step in to short-circuit the tension-filled exchange as soon as it begins.** Although it's usually impolite to interrupt, have something on your mind that you could ask one of the people when you notice the two debating. Lightly touch one's elbow and say something like, "I just thought

of something I forgot to ask you. Did your friend, Sam get married?"

- ▶ You could also use a group-directed comment like, "Hey everybody! Did you hear that our old neighbor, James, retired? I saw him at the store last week."

3. **Talk to one of the offending family members in advance.** For example, if your sister doesn't get along with another family member, talk to her before the get-together. Say something like, "I've noticed that you and Kim don't get along very well. What can be done to make things easier for you at dinner on Saturday?"

- ▶ ***Even if she doesn't come up with a suggestion, you've at least let your sister know that people notice the exchanges and would like for them to stop occurring.*** Your question might curb your sister's behavior or serve as a reminder for her to keep herself in check. ***And it only takes one of them to stop the behaviors to squelch the tension.***

4. **Keep people informed.** As families grow larger, sometimes people feel left out of the holiday planning. Use technology to let everyone know what's planned. Emails, text messages, and even Facebook can be used to apprise everyone of this year's holiday festivities. If family members feel they are communicated with equally, some tensions may be reduced.

5. **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Ignore small or insignificant sniping from one person to another. If the snapping at one another doesn't stop as quickly as it began, then interrupt them as stated in #2.

Reducing holiday tensions can be skillfully accomplished by using the above ideas. Putting space between people who don't get along, short-circuiting verbal exchanges, discussing issues in advance, keeping people informed, and ignoring insignificant comments add up to less tension and stress for all who attend. Establish a tradition of reduced holiday tension in your family.

*"That's what the holidays are for – for one person to tell the stories and another to dispute them. Isn't that the Irish way?"*

**-Lara Flynn Boyle**

## 7. HOLIDAY TRAVEL TIPS TO REDUCE STRESS

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If you're going to be traveling during the holiday season, you'll be subjected to a whole different type of holiday stressors. However, you can take some steps to ensure you have a low-stress trip for the holidays.

1. **Plan your travel months in advance.** If you're flying in November or December, book your flights in January or February. This way, you'll be assured of having your travel venue established and won't get caught up in the last minutes rush for flights and inflated pricing. ***Plus, it will help you spread out your holiday spending.***
2. **Save extra cash all year for travel snafus.** If you should get snowed in during a layover, you'll need extra money for meals, cabs, and hotel.
3. **Learn to pack light.** Develop a short list of what to take on your trip. Think about 1 pair of dress slacks, 1 pair of casual slacks, a pair of jeans, a black sweater, 3 colored tops, and a warm scarf. Take care that you can mix and match every clothing item you take. Most importantly, ***carry on your bags*** to prevent your bag being lost or placed on the wrong flight.
4. **Consider mailing your gifts in advance.** Tell the relatives you'll be staying with that you'll be mailing a box of gifts to them and ask them to simply place the box in a corner or under the tree until you arrive. Better yet, if you give gift cards, they'll be easy to pack and transport to your destination.
5. **Allow plenty of time getting to and from the airport or train station.** The added stress of worrying you'll miss your flight or train is unnecessary. Avoid it by giving yourself extra time.



6. **Pack healthy snacks.** A peanut butter sandwich with an apple and a bag of grapes might come in very handy on a long flight that serves tasteless, refrigerated, expensive foods or worse yet, no food at all. Nutritious granola bars are another option to quell hunger on a trip.

***Traveling for the holidays doesn't have to be terribly stressful.*** Apply the above strategies to ensure you make it to your destination rested and ready to share in the holiday traditions with your family members and loved ones.

*"Just as a puppy can be more of a challenge than a gift,  
so too can the holidays."*

***-John Clayton***

## 8. SUMMARY

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Celebrating the holidays can be a stress-filled season filled with long to-do lists and broken budgets or a lovely time of peace and joy spent with family and loved ones. Spend some time sorting out the traditions you want to continue and forming those that fit for you and your family. Make efforts to

simplify festivities and gift-giving. Stick to a budget and do what you can to reduce family tensions. If you must travel, make efforts to reduce your stress. ***You have the power to create cherished memories of beautiful, and fulfilling holidays.***

May peace be with you this holiday season!