



Making the Holidays Special

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WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR HOLIDAYS SPECIAL THIS YEAR? To answer this question you could reflect on particularly memorable holidays from your past, consult the Internet, or poll your friends and family for their thoughts. I'm sure that you will come up with many ideas, but few will involve the commercial holiday hazard of spending way too much money on the latest toys and digital devices or fulfilling the expectations of everyone but yourself.

Some people find that tried-and-true family traditions are what make the holidays special for them. Holiday traditions can help us feel connected to each other and to something greater than ourselves. Whether it involves attending a candlelight Christmas Eve church service, playing powder-puff football in the snow, or trolling the neighborhood singing Christmas carols to friends and neighbors, holiday traditions can provide a sense of security and comfort. We have found that when our adult children come home for the holidays, in addition to the traditional events, we like to do things that support the arts, like gathering at Second City Chicago, attending a Trans-Siberian Orchestra concert, or checking out Morton Arboretum's illumination display.

Perhaps this is the year to break away from the traditions that no

longer fit, like that ugly Christmas sweater that you have worn for the last ten years to the company holiday party. For example, I find that some families are "game families," whereas others are not. I am from one of those families that didn't play games, and I always felt something was missing on the holidays as I grew up. I eventually

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learned that playing games together, especially during the holidays, is great fun and a wonderful way to bring everyone to the table (as long as the snacks are good and we don't get too competitive!). In addition to games, holding a crazy contest, such as an ugly dance competition, can be a fun way to burn off the holiday dinner and help everyone lighten up. But if you are from a family that always plays games or gets way too competitive, perhaps it's time to do something else more active around the holidays, like going ice skating or snow skiing.

The holidays are a special time for the family to take a reflective look back at the previous year. Kicking off this time of year by sharing our blessings and all the things we are grateful for can set the stage for a more peaceful time. We also have

to acknowledge the more challenging aspects of the previous year and support each other in the process.

The holidays are also a time of giving. But most adults would agree that the commercial aspects of the holidays and gift giving have gotten way out of proportion. Perhaps it's time to consider an alternative to giving gifts. You could offer the gift of time to perform a service such as offering to babysit or clean another person's house or yard. Or you could consider giving a card with a heartfelt note inside along with a donation to a charity in that person's name. Some families derive a great deal of satisfaction from a service project that offers hope to others. Some examples include adopting a family in need through Catholic Charities, serving in a soup kitchen or food bank, visiting shut-ins, or writing a letter or sending a gift to a soldier overseas. Such activities color the season with greater meaning.

There are many ways to make this holiday season special for you and your family, but what's most important is to appreciate the spirit of the season and the ones you are with. ■

Jeffrey L. Santee, PhD, DCEP, is a clinical psychologist with advanced training in cognitive psychology and behavioral medicine. In addition to his work in men's and marital issues, he specializes in the treatment of depression, anxiety disorders, and stress-related health problems.



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Congratulations to our very own Dr. Jeff Santee!



The Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP) has awarded Jeff the designation of DCEP, Diplomate Comprehensive Energy Psychology!

Energy Psychology is a unique mind-body therapy that combines traditional cognitive interventions with techniques to rebalance the body's energy systems, and works gently with three of the more well-known components of the human energy system: the meridians, chakras, and biofields.

To learn more about Energy Psychology and the latest research in the field, visit www.energypsych.org.

You might also enjoy seeing Dr. Santee's interview with host Kevin McDermott on Public Perspective Television, www.publicperspective.tv, episode 291, or <http://publicperspective.tv/show.asp?v=178>.

To make an appointment or to speak with Dr. Santee, call (630)260-0606x127. ■

Finding Meaning and Joy in the Holiday Season

AS WE APPROACH THE HOLIDAY season, many of us will experience a mixture of emotions which can run the gamut anywhere from excited anticipation to pure dread. While the goal is to enjoy and appreciate the season, we often settle for simply getting through the holidays. But here are some ways to go a step further and find meaning and, yes, joy in the holiday season.

Be realistic in your expectations. If your family can barely tolerate each other, do not expect them suddenly become BFFs. Remember, what you see on TV and at the movies makes for a good story but is not necessarily realistic. When expectations are in line with reality, we are more content.

You may find yourself alone or lonely this time of year. The solution may be to **reach out to others through volunteering or giving.** A strong sense of satisfaction accompanies focusing on others. It truly is a win-win situation.

Prioritize. Sometimes we can get overwhelmed by spreading ourselves too thin. Decide which activities are really important to you and focus on them. Maybe you don't have to bake as many cookies as you assume. Or you don't have to buy gifts for everyone you know. It is up to you to set boundaries and protect the parts of the holiday that you feel are important.

Develop rituals or routines. For some people, attending church is an important ritual of the season.

For others it might be watching a certain holiday show or looking at decorations. Once again, decide what works for you and your loved ones, and go for it. Also, don't be afraid to change things up.

The holidays are times for **memories.** A major part of this season is remembering loved ones who are no longer with us. Take some time to cherish the ornaments your adult child made when he was in first grade. Remembering past happy times while adjusting to constant changes in our lives are key to finding meaning not only in the holidays but also in our lives. ■

Lisa Hopkins, NCC, LCPC, CADC, PCGC enjoys the holiday season but has learned to also be a realist.

Bringing Love to the Holidays

WE ARE ABOUT TO EMBARK on the holiday season, hopefully full of family, love, and good memories. However, nowadays, the holidays can appear to be full of candy, desserts and presents. As a parent, I value this opportunity to help my children understand the true meaning of love, compassion and kindness.

No matter your available budget or time, there are ways to teach your family how to give back. The first step is to talk about compassion and what that may mean for your family. Promote understanding and caring behavior by letting them catch you in acts of kindness. Then find meaningful ways to give back together.

As your family prepares for trick-or-treating, consider the following ideas:

- ✦ Donate old costumes
- ✦ Trick-or-treat at local hospitals
- ✦ Send candy to the troops through organizations such as Operation Gratitude or Operation Shoebox
- ✦ Donate candy to Ronald McDonald House Charities (local chapter in Oak Brook)
- ✦ Support the Teal Pumpkin Project, which promotes allergy-friendly options for trick-or-treating
- ✦ Participate in World Kindness Day (November 13), in which people across the world make an extra effort to care for others
- ✦ Similarly, participate in Giving Tuesday/#GivingTuesday, which takes place the Tuesday after Thanksgiving and focuses on donations to those in need
- ✦ Collect donations for a food pantry or sponsor a full Thanksgiving meal for a local family (typically about \$50 per family)
- ✦ Write and send "Thankful cards" to people in your life
- ✦ Send letters or bring goodies to local firefighters and police officers

- ✦ Write thank you notes to active military and veterans
- ✦ Serve meals at a local homeless shelter

Remember the meaning of the season, no matter what holiday your family celebrates, and demonstrate kindness through these ideas:

- ✦ Encourage your child to donate one toy for every toy received
- ✦ Sponsor a child or family by donating presents through your local church or school
- ✦ Visit nearby nursing homes and spend time with the residents
- ✦ If applicable, encourage your family's visiting elf to promote daily acts of kindness
- ✦ Provide a card or small gift to busy postal workers
- ✦ Offer hugs, help, and hope to those you encounter this season

I wish all of our families a safe, happy, and helping holiday season!

Dr. Danielle Romano-Cihak is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, who specializes in therapy with children, young adults, and families.

