



Meaningful Holidays

Don't get confused. YOU and family and friends are the important elements in your children's holiday experiences. The people they love are what they want.

Guidelines to consider:

- 1. Manage your expectations** – don't expect your holiday to look like a TV show or greeting card or movie – those are make-believe. Even a Martha Stewart creation can take up precious time that doesn't enrich your family's experience. How it feels is more important than how it looks.
- 2. Plan ahead** – what do you want the season to be like? Ask the children – what makes the holidays enjoyable for them? You might be surprised.
- 3. Invite the children to make a list of what they want** – both things and stuff to do. Once the list is made, be done with the "wants" related to "things."
- 4. Focus on doing, rather than getting.** Create a list of festive activities to do with the whole family, with friends and with individuals. Think outside the box and make them happen.
- 5. Prepare for family tensions and negative patterns** – when we are with our family we sometimes fall into old patterns – arguing with the nasty in-laws, worrying about the alcoholic uncle, feeling left out. Plan for the patterns, think about those in the family who are your allies and make a plan in advance to connect with them to help you get some perspective.
- 6. Notice your thoughts** – do you have a committee in your head judging your holiday plans? Do you think you are responsible for making your kids happy all the time? Do you believe you are supposed to be the holiday magician? Can you ask for help?
- 7. Create new traditions and keep only those old ones that are positive** – talk with family members in advance and think about what you liked last year, what you saw other families do, what you can dream up. Don't assume this year has to be like last year or like the year before or like your own childhood.
- 8. Give yourself space and keep up your self-care** – This is not the time to stop going to the gym or get less sleep. Holidays come with stress, self-care is essential to navigate them with greater serenity.
- 9. Expect to have intense emotions** – express them. If you are feeling sad, find someone to support you to let the tears flow. If you are angry, find some ways to vent. Don't assume that either you or the children should be merry all the time. Acknowledge your children's emotions (and your own) without judgment. Releasing negative emotions can create space for the peace you are craving.
- 10. Children remember good times, not toys** – have fun.

