



The Happier Parent **HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE**

Staying Whole When Everyone Wants
a Piece of You, and Some of Them Bite



No matter what you're celebrating or where, holidays mean you've got society, culture, history and family members knocking at your door, all telling you loud and clear what your festive season should look like and how you should behave and feel while it happens, not to mention what you should expect from your kids.

You've been soaking in that message for years now, which means you've internalized a grand vision of how this should go as well, coupled with a solid recognition that things rarely turn out as planned. Your father wants the meal to be gluten- and dairy-free, your children take off their matching sweaters and put on Elsa costumes, your Hong Kong clients really need a conference call and worst of all, it's the most wonderful time of the year, you feel anything but wonderful, and you've made sure everyone around you knows it.

That combo is a recipe for cranberry-pumpkin-sage-cinnamon-apple-streusel-deusel misery pie, which may be Starbucks' next Frappuccino recipe, but isn't something you need in your overstuffed fridge. What you do need is a mental re-set button, one that allows you toss aside everything you should, must or always do at the holidays, and do what matters instead.

Here's how to quit chasing the festive season you think you should have,
and choose instead to love the one you've got.

PICK YOUR 1 THING

What do you love – really love – about your holiday? Put that on the calendar first. For me, it's baking an elaborate gingerbread house and frosting sugar cookies. If I don't get to do that, it wasn't a holiday for me. I may not manage to send cards, and half the decorations may stay in boxes, but I'll still be creating an advanced architectural structure from rock-hard cookie and royal icing.

LET SOME THINGS GO

You know what I want? To support my kids' schools. You know what I don't want? Wreaths and poinsettias. History tells me I'll be trudging through the snow to get rid of those in March. So please, accept my donation and keep the greenery. You should feel free to give up something bigger. Make a big holiday breakfast and enjoy pizza and board games for dinner.

Here's how to know what to say no to: Would you want to do it/eat it/own it right-now-this-minute? If not, you won't want it later, either.



ASK YOUR FAMILY

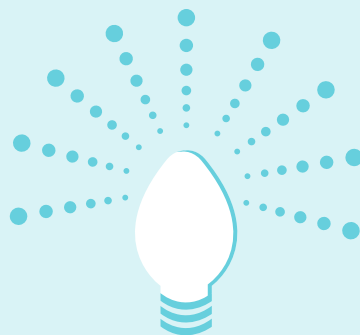
What Matters

Watching you stress over a big holiday dinner may not be their idea of fun, especially if what they love most is putting together a puzzle in front of a fire. Ask what decorations they remember and what excursions they treasure and stick to those, and let older kids get involved. My daughter's "one thing" is matching holiday pajamas: without those, it's just another month. While I'm icing cookies, she's on Pajamas.com and we're both happy.

NO IS YES & YES IS NO

Everything you say yes to becomes a no to something else. Yes to a holiday party is no to a cozy evening at home, and vice versa, and that's ok. Listen to what you really want, weigh it against how much joy you'll get if doing something else brings happiness to someone you love, and then decide what to do, and do it.

LEAVE SOME **WHITE** SPACE



Yes, you could fit in your neighbor's snow-sculpture party, right after your sister-in-law's open house and before the family dinner, especially if you leave the craft fair early. But don't. Leave some hours, some evenings, some whole days blank.



DISREGARD AND DISENGAGE

Everybody's got a holiday vision, and they're not all of sugarplums. If your brother's mental story stars him as the unappreciated, unloved middle child, or your aunt is the martyr who sacrifices all for family, your best bet is not to take a part in that movie. When she's following you around fussing that there won't be enough gluten-free food for your niece with celiac (even though your sister is perfectly happy) or he's commandeering your kitchen to make his famous apple pie hampered by your horrible apple peeler and the wrong kind of apples and why-don't-you-have-fresh-nutmeg, let them have their solo scenes.

If you must, you can enter the drama at a time of your choosing, but remember, some people don't want to be happy. You do. That may mean you need to stick to your own script this year.

ONE AT A TIME, *Please*

Your uncle wants to talk business. Your grandmother wants to empty the dishwasher for you, but can you just show her where the spoons go? And this whisk, and the plates, and the cups, and what is this tong thing? Your sister in law wants you to be as worried about the calories in the eggnog as she is, your partner wants you to help move the table into the family room and your toddler doesn't want you talk to anyone else, ever again as long as she lives. It's the holidays, you're surrounded by family and friends, and everyone wants a piece of you. It would be terrible to be alone and friendless this time of year, right? Alone and friendless, maybe in a nice hotel room with a remote control and room service...

Deep breaths. One at a time, full focus for whoever's in front of you, hugs when words don't seem to be enough. *Uncle Ray, can you help move this table? Baby, can you help great-grandma?* There may not be enough you to go around, but there's enough love for everybody.

DON'T PAY TWICE

Holidays can be tough, especially if you've lost someone this year or had some rough times. You don't have to feel happy about what happened, but if you're ready for some happiness, you can find in it the parts of your holiday you've always enjoyed. As Ellen Langer says, this terrible thing has already happened. It's already taken things from you. Don't throw everything else in after it. Don't pay twice. You still get to have joy.



Remind Yourself
**THIS IS WHERE YOU
WANT TO BE**

Maybe this isn't the perfect holiday season. But given what you've got – your existing family, your bank account, your job your community and your world – aren't you exactly where you want to be, doing what you want to do? Sure, a season in Hawaii sounds great, but you wouldn't want it if it meant leaving everything you love behind. Savor what's good about where you are. Soak it up. Make it yours.



Mantras

FOR HOLIDAY HAPPINESS

**NO IS YES
& YES IS NO**

So choose mindfully.

**DISREGARD
& DISENGAGE**

Then go find someone
happy to talk to.

**IF IT ISN'T SOMETHING
YOU LOVE OR THAT
YOUR FAMILY LOVES,
DO SOMETHING ELSE.**

**I AM WHERE I WANT
TO BE, DOING WHAT
I WANT TO DO.**



Yeah, everybody wants a piece of you. That's kind of nice, really. Just be sure to serve yourself first.

