



CENTERSTONE

Wellness Program

How to Put the Happy Back in the Holidays

4 questions to ask to reduce your stress this year!

Advertisements are filling the mail, decorations are mounting in the stores, and the time for planning the events of the season is here. But thoughts of all these activities can bring more stress than pleasure if we lose perspective and allow anxiety to take over.

If the holidays are becoming more stressful than joyful, you may want to reevaluate how you approach the season. Planning ahead will increase your sense of control if you're feeling out-of-control. Keeping your expectations manageable will allow you the time to slow down and enjoy the moments. This article will encourage you to put the happy back in your holidays by asking yourself four fundamental questions.

What is the purpose?

Decide the meaning behind the moments of this holiday season. What is the overall purpose and reason to acknowledge this time of year? Perhaps it is about family togetherness, or your faith, or freedom, or all of the above. Refocusing your attitude and outlook is the first step in minimizing the stress of the season. The media can make this time of year seem filled with glee and bliss and not acknowledge the realities of the required organization and planning to make it a time of joy, not jitters. Take the time and effort to reaffirm what this season really means to you.

Remembering your values can help redesign the meaning of the season for you and your family.

Tips

- **Refocus your outlook**
- **Reaffirm the reason**
- **Remember your values**

What do you want to continue?

Think about the things that have brought true enjoyment to your holiday season throughout the years. What traditions do you want to continue or incorporate into your holiday? Recall memories of the people, the projects or the plans that helped enhance your celebration. Some traditions still bring great gladness for your family, and can be looked forward to again this year. Unfortunately, we cannot always recapture the happiness we reminiscence about, due to death or divorce or other major life changes. But we can be intentional in planning what we most look forward to.

Tips

- **Reminisce**
- **Recall the joyfulness**
- **Resume favorite traditions**

What do you want to stop?

What has brought you the most stress while preparing for the holiday season in years past? What are the things that interfere with your joy? Eliminate these activities that increase your stress. Maybe the task of writing out Christmas cards to everyone you know is no longer something you look forward to. That's Ok. Don't do it! The homes and the happiness of others will not be shattered if you discontinue sending cards. If you are tired of always going to Aunt Betty's for Thanksgiving, suggest an alternative plan.

So often we spend the holiday season going to gatherings we simply don't want to attend but we can't find a way to get out of them or feel obliged to go. Practice and prepare to say "no" to the many requests and invitations that you will not be able to accept. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. By simplifying your schedule, the stress and anxiety will lessen.

Perhaps overspending or overeating is how you have previously indulged, only to be overwhelmed with regrets by early January. Prepare a budget for spending on gifts and remember the financial cost does not equal the level of care in giving.

Tips

- **Prevent the pressure**
- **Practice saying "no"**
- **Prepare a budget**

What is something new you could do?

Have a family meeting to brainstorm ideas and options for new traditions you can begin this year! Come up with new or different ideas for activities to include in your celebrations that would bring authentic joy to yourself or others. Consider how you can have more of what you value, need and desire this year and be sure to schedule needed down time for yourself in the middle of the hustle and bustle. Host a day of simple enjoyment and relaxation with friends or family – no major planning or purchasing required.

What is a cause you believe in, or a charity you respect, that you could honor in a new way? Give in a way that comes naturally for you vs. what you "should" do. Volunteering our time, our strengths and our gifts is always uplifting not only for others, but also for us.

Tips

- **Have a family meeting**
- **Host a relaxation day**
- **Help others**

The holidays can be the best of times and the worst of times. But remembering you are in control of your time, your money, and the moments you choose to make as memories can increase your confidence and improve your outlook - to approach it with enthusiasm not angst. And while your ideal holiday may only be an illusion or fantasy, you can still make choices that reduce your stress and increase your happiness. When you eliminate the things that drag you down, you then have more time and energy to create new meaning, for this time of year or anytime!

More at Midday November 8, 2006

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), celebrating 50 years of service in 2006, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. A not-for-profit organization, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Each year, the organization provides services to more than 50,000 individuals. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies. In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org.