

Taking the stress out of the holiday season
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Many people hate the holiday season. It turns into a frenzy of looking for the perfect gift, decorating the house like Martha Stewart, trying to entertain while managing a job, and dealing with special end-of-the-year events with the children. There are those who stay up all night wrapping gifts, then feel aggravated by the fact that no one seems to notice how carefully the packages were prepared before they ripped them to shreds.

Here's some advice to get through this holiday season with a lot less stress: let go of being perfect. Stop trying to meet everyone else's expectations of the perfect family gathering, the perfect meal, the perfect present. And that includes the expectations of yourself for being perfect. There is no need to suffer through the season.

There are a lot of downsides to trying to be perfect: spending more time than necessary on activities that may have little long-term impact; getting so caught up in the details that the why behind the action gets forgotten; negatively impact physical and mental health; and stressing the most important personal relationships by alienating those near and dear with a relentless pursuit of perfection.

Instead, use the holiday season to begin being kind to yourself. Acknowledge that trying to be perfect is highly stressful and potentially harmful. Accept that doing one's best is enough. Then practice letting go of perfectionism by using these five phrases:

- I accept my desire for everything to be perfect, even though I know it's not possible;
- I am open to the possibility that I cannot control everything;
- I am open to the possibility that everything will be perfect just the way it is;
- I am willing to be less critical of myself; and
- I am willing to ask for help when I need it and let the rest go.

The world is not a perfect place and often seems out of control. Time seems shortened by the large amount of items to do, and the days are also shorter and darker this time of year. Trying to create the perfect holiday can actually exacerbate our sense of how much is out of control. Don't begin a new year exhausted by last year's holiday season. Think realistically about holiday expectations in terms of the time, money, and energy to be expended on the holidays. Setting limits in each of these categories will help to let go of being perfect.

Think about what parts of the holiday recharge rather than drain. How many of the activities are actually necessary for the enjoyment of the season? Focus on the traditions reflecting personal values. Think about which traditions actually still work and which ones no longer serve the original purpose. Is there one particular

tradition, like having friends over to sing carols around the piano, to keep? No need to have the perfect canapés, just buy some frozen prepared miniature quiches, heat them up and call it done. No one is going to remember what they ate: they are going to remember the camaraderie of singing off tune and laughing together.

Loving, sharing, and giving are the three values that do not require being perfect. Being happy instead of worried during the time spent with family and friends is bound to affect their mood. Enjoy the process of decorating, cooking, entertaining in small increments, and simplify your holiday season. Letting go of perfect can restore the spirit.

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