

# Managing the Holidays

## *Tips for Dealing with Expectations and Seasonal Stressors*

**Clearwater, FL – December 19, 2008** – We've all seen those picture perfect portrayals of holiday gatherings everywhere from television shows and movies to advertisements and commercials. It's no surprise that the media depictions of happy, stress-free holiday preparations and gatherings are unrealistic. Between the financial crisis, unemployment rates, and emotional stressors many families are anxious about this season's plans.

Children are influenced from an early age about what they should expect to be receiving during the holiday season. Advertisers and stores begin appealing to children's wants earlier and earlier each year, while promoting more and more expensive and lavish products. Parents must walk a thin line between spending within their means, while wanting to fulfill their children's dreams. This year many parents will have tighter budgets than they have in the past.

With tighter budgets comes the need for more creative gift giving ideas. **Nancy Gordon, LCSW, Clinical Director at Directions for Mental Health in Clearwater**, has several suggestions for budget-conscious gifts and ways to discuss children's lofty expectations. Gordon suggests promoting awareness about less fortunate children in the local area by getting the family together to donate old toys or to gather non-perishable items for local food banks and shelters. This activity will create holiday memories, and maybe even a new philanthropic tradition, while providing a great opportunity to give families a chance to be thankful for all they have.

As for gifts, they don't have to be expensive to be appreciated. Creating home made coupon books that include coupons for gifts like "one free room clean," "one week (or even day) of no fighting" between siblings, "one week of changing diapers," or designated family time like "game night" are sure to be appreciated by parents and children alike. All family members can participate, and it can be fun, full of creativity, and lasts beyond the holiday.

Holiday stress can also be attributed to anxiety surrounding family gatherings. It doesn't take long for discussions to escalate into full-scale arguments between family members during the holiday season. "Before getting together, families should agree not to discuss certain issues that could create tension," Gordon suggests. It is also important to prioritize what is important. The fact that Aunt Cindy forgot a birthday or that Cousin Jimmy still hasn't paid back his loan aren't things to focus on during family gatherings. These things can be put aside until after the New Year and then discussed accordingly. Your family will thank you for this simple consideration.

There is an extreme amount of pressure for perfection during the holidays. The truth is most memorable family moments are created as a result of imperfect events. While it may be upsetting that the pumpkin pie ended up on the kitchen floor, for years to come it will be a source of playful jesting at future family events. The best way to reduce stress this holiday season is to remain flexible and focus on time spent with loved ones. Remember that mistakes aren't going to ruin the time everyone spends together; instead they will contribute to the familial bonds that will be recalled for years to come.

***About Directions for Mental Health, Inc.***

Directions for Mental Health, Inc., established in 1982, is a non-profit organization committed to helping heal the hurt in the lives of thousands of Pinellas County residents suffering from – or at risk of – mental illness. With nationally accredited programs, Directions sets the standard for best practices in mental health treatment, while making mental health care affordable and accessible to individuals and families, and building a safer, healthier community. Serving more than 8,000 people per year, Directions is dedicated to developing innovative programs that change lives, while reducing crime, homelessness, drug abuse, and child abuse.

For questions about mental illness and programs, visit Directions for Mental Health's website at [www.healthehurt.com](http://www.healthehurt.com) or call (727) 524-4464 extension 1700.

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