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Entertaining During the Holidays

Entertaining during the holidays can be fun and rewarding, or it can be very stressful and disappointing. It's fundamentally a matter of setting attainable, modest goals and then having the time to sit back and enjoy the fun. So here are some guidelines that can help you stay out of the danger zone and in the circle of happiness:

- *Evaluate Your Goals* – Think about what means the most to you and your loved ones. Usually it comes down to sharing good feelings. It doesn't matter that you cook a gourmet meal, or have your home decorated like Disneyland. It doesn't matter if your gifts are modest, or everyone is eating with paper plates and plastic utensils. Right? It matters that you haven't burnt yourself out and alienated your loved ones by being a driven, nervous wreck. Remember, Martha Stewart is an anal-retentive, egomaniac.
- *Pick Activities That Bring People Together* – Stick with time-proven things that work. Allow plenty of time, so you don't have to rush. Don't come up with something that everybody has to participate in. There'll always be some who won't want to. What counts is the sentiment of the occasion, not the impressive scope of all you provide. It's about the people, not things. Cherish the time you have together.
- *Don't Invite Problem Relatives* – Some people always create tension, conflicts or misunderstandings. If you must spend some time with this type of relative, don't invite them to your big gathering. Instead, visit them separately, and fulfill your obligations without involving them where they can wreak their negativity.
- *Adapt to New Circumstances* – It may be that things have changed this year and certain people won't be attending. Instead of feeling an absence and let down, share some emails, photos or videotapes that you received this year. Or maybe you'll have a conference call with them at the gathering. Be creative and acknowledge things are different but not lost. This positive spin lifts the spirits of everyone.
- *Don't Overextend* – Don't visit everyone you know. Limit travel, it's not a good time to drive a lot. (Being at home with just your immediate family/friends can be rewarding.) Don't experiment by preparing a new dish; stick to what is manageable. Don't serve a lot of alcohol (eggnog, wine, after dinner drinks, etc.). There'll always be some who overindulge, don't tempt everyone. Too much booze leads to unexpected emotional outbursts, arguments or teary sadness.
- *Take Care of Number One* – Stick to your self-maintenance routines: get enough sleep, pace yourself and take a break if you need it; keep exercising, (it fends off the holiday blues and burns off excess calories); don't do everything yourself, asking for help with serving or cleaning up can bring people together. If people bombard you with invitations, you'll just have to turn some down, instead of being a people-pleaser and exhausting your body and sacrificing your enjoyment.
- *Accept Limitations* – This one may be the most important. There are bound to be some plans that just don't work out. Your life isn't a fantasy movie full of happy endings; it's reality. Things come up to change the best plans and intentions. Some relative may open their fat mouth and put a damper on a happy visit. Whatever happens, just stay focused on the fact that you did your best, and remember the good moments.