

Creating Happy Holidays

\$5.95

A Guide to Making Holiday Get-Togethers
Memorable & Enjoyable for Every Generation



- ✓ A 3-Generation Perspective
- ✓ Gift Ideas for Seniors
- ✓ Planning Checklists
- ✓ Tips for Reducing Stress
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Creating Happy Holidays

**A Guide to Making Holiday Get-togethers
Memorable & Enjoyable for Every Generation**

By Diana Beam

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Thank you to Katherine, Elaine and Whitney ... Without their fine efforts and assistance this would never have happened.

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A word from Diana

*T*he one thing I most enjoy about any holiday is having my family together to share our love and hope for what lies ahead and to celebrate our joy and happiness. For us this holiday season, the gift giving has been pared back significantly, and we have asked our children not to buy gifts for us – we have enough pajamas, robes, ties, fruitcakes and “dust collectors.” I told my family that we’d just like the gift of their time – perhaps a handwritten certificate for a car wash. We’d even be thrilled to have another one of those paper plate angel tree-toppers like the one my grandson made in the first grade.

Even without the pressures of finding the perfect gift, for some, the holiday season is difficult, lonely or filled with anxiety. Whether this will be their first without a loved one, or one of many for which too little time or money, or too much distance will keep family apart, it is easy to understand why shiny packages under the tree become less and less important. For these brave hearts, just knowing that someone cares and desires to share some loving spirit with them is the best gift.

We all know that the holidays are about more than presents purchased at the mall. Holidays are about building cherished memories that last a lifetime. Everyone should carry a visual image of a special holiday with family or even a memory triggered by a certain scent – Grandma’s pumpkin pie anyone! These memories and experiences shape us.

On the pages of this booklet, I offer some ideas for creating holiday memories that everyone, from seniors to children, can treasure for years to come. While this book is intended for anyone who wants to make this holiday special, often women are the ones who feel the most pressure to organize, plan, cook, shop or otherwise make the family happy during holiday times. And, as I like to say, "If Mama ain't happy, nobody's happy." So, I've assembled the varied perspectives of three different generations: "Grandma," "Daughter," and "Granddaughter." Hopefully you'll gain insight from these perspectives that will help you make this holiday season better than ever.

Merry Christmas to you and yours! ~ Diana

Diana Beam is the founder of Keeping In Touch Solutions, a friendly and professional service that extends the reach of distant caregivers by checking in daily with their aging parents or loved ones to ensure their safety, health and wellbeing. For more information, visit www.KeepingInTouchSolutions.com, call 1-800-664-5541, or write to:

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Overview

“Over the river and onto the turnpike...”

"Over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother's house we go" may be the American vision of family get-togethers at holidays, but the reality for most is a much less scenic and often lengthy look at the American landscape, not to mention a real test of sanity. In fact, this line was written in 1844, a time when the typical family lived in close proximity and a horse-drawn sleigh might very well have been the preferred mode of transportation. However, the times (and thankfully the roads) have changed. In 1844, typical families shared common social and economic interests and goals. Families of today are diverse, spread out, and anything but "typical."

Today, the trip to Grandma's house is more likely to involve a really long car ride or flight complete with multiple connections, layovers and at least a slight chance of adverse weather complications. Then there's the expense, the calendar coordination, and even that blessed "alone in the car" time that translates to stress, stress and more stress to bookend your holiday time. And the travel logistics element of getting together is just the beginning (and the end). There's where to stay, what to bring, what to eat, what to give.

Thinking beyond the more tangible challenges, how do we evolve our family get-togethers in a way that recognizes and celebrates old traditions while still leaving room for new ones? How do we cross

generational lines to make everyone feel comfortable, included and respected for the unique position they hold in the family? How do we conjure memories of holidays past while creating equally special ones for years to come?

In this booklet, I've attempted to address these questions from three perspectives: that of a grandmother looking back on years of cherished memories and traditions; that of a daughter, sandwiched between caring for her aging parents and her own grown children; and that of a granddaughter who has just started a new family with desires to create happy holiday memories in the coming years.



Obviously, there are other perspectives to consider – children clearly have their own ideas for the perfect holiday – but in the interest of simplicity, this booklet is for the generations of adults who know the importance of getting together for the holidays with family and friends and creating memories that last a lifetime. With a little planning and understanding of the varied perspectives of family members, young and old, you can create a successful holiday get-together for all involved.

Define “Family”

***“Families are like fudge - mostly sweet
with a few nuts.”***

– Author Unknown

There are large families, small families and middle-sized families; multi- or single-generational families; some composed of “blood” relatives and some that limit the definition only by how many can comfortably fit around the dining room table. There are some who spend every holiday together and some who struggle to congregate on even one. Whatever the make-up, chances are your family is not “perfect,” but *family* nonetheless. The idea is to create a holiday experience that appeals at least in some ways to everyone, so that everyone looks forward to doing it again and again.

Take a few minutes to figure out who will be coming to your holiday get-together. Just because your table only fits eight comfortably, doesn’t mean that you can’t improvise on seating. The important thing is to include not only those who share your genetic history, but also those with whom you have cherished relationships. Don’t get caught up in someone else’s definition. What is *your* idea of family?

Understand the demographics of your family, so that you can appropriately plan ways to make everyone feel included and special. Although children are (and should be) the focus of any family get-together, senior relatives and friends are important as well. And, by paying attention to their needs, you teach the younger

generations the lessons of honor and respect for all ages.

And if you are attending a get-together at another family member's home, be sure to let them know you are coming and ask what you can bring. Just because "it's family" doesn't mean common courtesy should be thrown out the window.

<p><i>I'd like to invite my neighbor this year. She doesn't have any family nearby and often spends holidays alone.</i></p>	
<p><i>As the "middle" generation, I really feel the pressure to bridge the gap between the diverse age groups. I wish it was easier!</i></p>	
<p><i>I often feel like my mom and grandma forget that I'm an adult now and that I can and <u>want</u> to bring a dish to pitch-in.</i></p>	

Make a Plan – Keep It Simple

Plans made swiftly and intuitively are likely to have flaws. Plans made carefully and comprehensively are sure to.

– Robert Grudin

Even if a family get-together is at Grandmother's house, Grandmother may not be able to manage the complex planning and scheduling required to pull everyone and everything together. That task falls to the middle-generation, and, with it, a mountain of stress. So, for your own sake, think ahead, make a written plan and keep it simple!

Just remember, while parents and grandparents look forward to seeing their families, they are often stressed because their role in the family has changed... nothing is as it was. Remember to be mindful of their feelings as you step into roles they've traditionally held. Ask for ideas and their participation in the planning, particularly if the event is going to be at their home.

Minimize the amount of work you or any other family member must do and minimize the amount of money you or any other family member must spend. Every holiday event doesn't have to be done up like the Macy's parade. Pick a date, make a list of invitees, decide on activities, plan a schedule, and divvy up the meal. Once you've tackled the big stuff, you can focus on the details that will inevitably make you crazy but that you'll insist on regardless.

<p><i>I remember fondly the days of everyone around our dining room table at Christmas. But, now that I've moved out of the house, I just don't have the room or even the energy to host anymore.</i></p>	
<p><i>These days, the holidays are a lot of work for me. I enjoy doing it, but it can be pretty stressful. I just want to create memories for my daughter and her children like I had growing up.</i></p>	
<p><i>My mom always goes overboard, but I love it! I only wish she'd let me help.</i></p>	

Cater to Seniors' Special Needs

"I used to dread getting older, because I thought I would not be able to do all the things I wanted to do, but now that I am older, I find that I don't want to do them."

– Lady Nancy Astor

Senior Medical specialists at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine note that older family members may be confused, tire easily or become stressed by the noise and confusion of a large gathering.

The experts recommend a few simple tactics to make seniors more comfortable and at ease at a family get-together:

- Designate a room with less activity for a senior family member to enjoy private, quiet conversation.
- Schedule time for older (and younger) guests to nap.
- Make sure that your elder family member takes medications on a regular basis during the holidays.
- Assign one or more family members to be responsible for helping an older relative with food or drink, making sure that they are included in the conversation, helping them to the bathroom, and just generally assuring that they feel a part of the family.

- Look for and fix safety problems. Remove slippery throw rugs, cords and other objects that could cause a person with balance problems to fall. If the get-together is in the grandparent's home, don't confuse them by rearranging the furniture.
- Consider that an older person may experience short-term memory problems. If he/she repeats a story over and over or forgets a recent conversation, don't embarrass them by saying, "You already told us that," or, "Don't you remember?"
- Include senior family members in each activity. If there is work to be done, ask the senior to do something simple such as folding napkins. When there is conversation, direct remarks to the senior as well as to the other members of the family.
- Encourage the grandparent, aunt or uncle to participate in the family get-together by sharing memories of the past. Not only does this make them feel more included, but children like to hear about the old times and the stories become a memory for them as well.
- Create new memories by taking the family on a drive around town, window shopping at the mall, walking in the park, or having the children entertain.

Remember, most aging parents and grandparents are physically and mentally active. They are able to participate in most family events. But, many families have or will have at least one senior member who requires special attention. Be mindful of his or her needs and look for ways to make the environment

comfortable. Seniors who don't or can't participate may really enjoy watching family have a good time. The next section will give you some ideas for fun family activities.

<p><i>All the commotion can be exhausting! It's nice to be able to lie down for a spell after dinner.</i></p>	
<p><i>Great Aunt Vera always tells the same stories. We all just smile and try to remember that we'll probably be telling the same stories some day.</i></p>	
<p><i>One of my favorite things to do at our holiday get-togethers is look at grandma's family albums and hear stories about my mom and her brothers and sisters growing up.</i></p>	

Plan a Range of Activities

“Thanksgiving is an emotional holiday. People travel thousands of miles to be with people they only see once a year. And then discover once a year is way too often.”

– Johnny Carson

Planning activities for the holiday get-together can be a challenge. Chances are the meal will be the center ring attraction, but having some things to do as a family before and after the meal can really help to make everyone comfortable and facilitate conversation across generational lines.

Revisit activities of previous get-togethers: What activities were fun and brought your family closer together? What activities caused conflict or negative feelings? And again, understanding the demographics of your family will help you make good decisions about an appropriate mix of activities.

There are many board games that are particularly fun for engaging people of multiple generations. Card games are a tradition for a lot of families. Even a 1000+-piece puzzle can woo even the most “uninterested” teenager away from the text messaging for a little while. Many aging parents grew up playing card games, like Canasta, Euchre, and Pinochle, and will take on the “youngsters” with fire in their eyes, intent on winning!

Other families enjoy rousing football games or other outdoor activities to work up their appetite. Keep a basket with a football, soccer ball, basketball or other

sporting equipment near the door to grab and play. If inclement weather forces everyone indoors, why not plug in the Nintendo Wii, which has games everyone can enjoy. Wii is a great generation buster. There is nothing like watching Uncle Ralph (age 90) learn how to bowl on Wii and become the Thanksgiving Wii bowling champ!

And don't forget about those hard-working family members in the kitchen! Someone has to get that fantastic meal on the table (although a pitch-in style meal is ideal for maximizing full family participation). For them, why not have some music playing – something fun to encourage kitchen dancing!

Post-meal activities might need to be slightly more subdued, but not comatose! The television will inevitably be on to accommodate the sports-lovers in the group, but you might be able to keep them awake with the occasional time-out or half-time family jingle at the piano.

And once again, don't leave out the clean-up crew. You might even consider playing a little game during the meal (trivia, perhaps) by which the losers earn a shift of 15 minutes of kitchen duty.

Try to honor traditions whenever possible and start new ones as a way to involve younger generations that might not find the fun in post-meal piano time, but would love to drive around and see the holiday lights and decorations or catch a movie that just came out in theatres.

Finally, remember too much family time may cause conflicts or boredom, so allow for a reasonable

amount of “free time,” especially when family members are staying for a few days. And, provide a “quiet space” for those who do need to take a refreshing nap.

I enjoy spending time with my grandchildren. I don't always know what they're talking about, but listening to them reminds me so much of my own youth.



Growing up, my mom spent practically all of the Christmas holiday in the kitchen. I want to be a part of the activities. I might even hire a “clean up crew” this year!



Last year, we all sat around and played “Catch Phrase,” and it was so much fun!



Consider a “Pitch-In” Meal

“Thanksgiving dinners take eighteen hours to prepare. They are consumed in twelve minutes. Half-times take twelve minutes. This is not coincidence.”

– Erma Bombeck

If you or a family member enjoys preparing a holiday meal, then by all means include this in your plan. Otherwise, don't put this extra burden on yourself or anyone else. Pitch-in style meals are easy to coordinate (unless of course Aunt Edna insists on bringing her special oysters casserole every year!). If arguments arise each year over who gets to bring the pumpkin pie, then throw everyone's name in a hat and draw names during the meal for next year's get-together.

Alternatively, arrange to have large meals catered. Several restaurants and grocery stores now cater full holiday meals. Of course, folks are still welcome to prepare a family favorite to augment the menu (yes, even Aunt Edna's oyster casserole).

Another option is to have dinner at a restaurant. More and more, families are choosing this option. Most cities and large towns have many restaurants that offer special holiday menus and large group seating. Just be sure to plan well in advance, as reservations may be hard to come by. You may have seniors in your group who will have difficulty waiting in line for an available table.

While we are on the subject, be considerate of the special dietary needs and restrictions of seniors (as well as those who are vegetarian, for example, or on a diet). Have substitutes available for alcohol, rich desserts, fried foods and other menu items that certain family members can't (or shouldn't) eat. You don't need to go crazy here, but this kind of thoughtfulness can have a huge impact.

<p><i>In my day, we started cooking days before the big dinner - home-made everything! These days I hear you can order an entire Thanksgiving dinner and have it delivered! But that can't possibly taste as good.</i></p>	
<p><i>Last year, I tried to do a pitch-in, but I made the mistake of letting everyone bring what they wanted. We had ham, stuffing and twelve pies! This year I'll give assignments, including some vegetables!</i></p>	
<p><i>Last year, grandma made her home-made pie-dough cookies and said she made them just for me. She remembered how much I loved them when I was little. Yep, I cried over pie-dough!</i></p>	

Accommodate Out-of-Town Family

“Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.”

– George Burns

This can be a particularly touchy subject for some. While wanting to stay at a hotel may be unheard of to your mother, you may prefer to have your own space, particularly if you've got a family of your own. And if yours is a family with many out-of-town members, then housing everyone may just be impossible.

The best approach for everyone involved is to open the lines of communication early. If you have the space to comfortably accommodate your family, then offer it. But, keep in mind that their not wanting to stay with you is not necessarily a reflection on your accommodations and possibly just a desire on their part to remove added stress from your shoulders.

Alternatively, if your elderly parents are not local, you should invite them to stay at your home but also give them the option of staying at a hotel. Identify a hotel nearby and suggest to out-of-town visitors that they make reservations there, if they prefer.

And while a hotel may be more appealing than sharing a bathroom with Uncle Ted, consider “taking one for the team” if you sense that having her family under one roof for a night is very important to your grandmother or mother.

Of course, another option is to suggest a vacation destination for your holiday get-together or even a cruise. This option isn't for everyone, but for the right families it can become a long-lasting and incredibly fun tradition.

<p><i>I am most comfortable at home, but now that we spend the holidays at my daughter's home, we stay with her. I just don't like to be a burden.</i></p>	
<p><i>The more the merrier, I say! Some of my fondest memories are of all of the cousins staying up late the night before talking and playing cards. I don't know why you'd want to stay in a hotel when you can be in a comfortable home.</i></p>	
<p><i>Now that I'm married and have a baby, it's just easier for us to stay at a hotel, where we have our own space, our own bathroom and a place to regroup, if needed.</i></p>	

Reduce Gift-Giving Stress

“A hug is a great gift - one size fits all, and it's easy to exchange.”

– Author Unknown

For many families, the subject of gifts holds more stress than anything else at holiday time. Shopping for gifts is time-consuming, expensive and, most often, results in a gift that serves only to help the merchant achieve a profit goal for the year.

Do yourself and your family a favor and decide on a set of rules or limits in advance. Once again, you'll want to consider the demographics of your family. While some members may have the financial means and desire to buy gifts for everyone, others may not and will feel pressured to reciprocate.

Some ideas for setting limits include:

- Gifts for children only
- Drawing a name out of a hat for next year's gift giving (Hosts will want to have a few “extras” on hand for surprise guests.)
- Home-made gifts only (Who doesn't love cookies?)
- Price limits (e.g., \$25)
- Certificates for services (This is a particularly great idea for seniors who probably don't need anymore “stuff” but could really use someone to clean out the gutters or remove yard debris. For more ideas, see the next section, *Gift Ideas for Seniors*.)

- “White Elephant” gifts, just for fun
- A charitable donation from the entire family

If you insist on giving a gift that doesn't fit within the limits you've defined as a family then give that gift privately.

Decide, too, how and when the gifts will be exchanged. Will everyone sit in a circle and take turns opening one gift at a time? If any amount of time was spent finding the “perfect” gift, then the giver will want to savor the moment. The thoughtfulness of giving loses its meaning in a mad dash to tear into all the gifts at once.

And lastly, remember that it's the thought that counts, even if you can't imagine what they could have been thinking! Respond to each gift not as something you plan to exchange at first opportunity, but as a hug that you just received from a family member who loves you.

<p><i>Please, no more fruitcake!</i></p>	
<p><i>My daughter and her husband are so hard to buy for.</i></p>	
<p><i>Our budget is pretty tight this year! I wish we could just draw names out of a hat or even just give tins of cookies.</i></p>	

The Gifts Seniors Really Want

“You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

– Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

It's often easier to know what seniors don't want - enough fruitcakes, aftershave, pajamas, handkerchiefs, boxed candies, and scented candles. The following are some actual responses senior citizens gave when asked, "What do you really want for the holidays?"

"Something around the house always needs attention ... a burned out light bulb, a toilet leak, a dirty furnace filter. I would like an on-call handyman to help me when I need it."

"The remote control for my TV is too complicated. All I want to do is change channels and adjust the volume. I would like a simple controller with big numbers."

"I need some new clothes but I'm not able to go shopping on my own. I would like my daughter to take me shopping."

"I haven't organized my financial records in years. I would like my son to organize them and set up a system so I manage it in the future."

"I have boxes and boxes of photographs. I need someone to sort through them and help me make a scrapbook."

"My garage door opener doesn't work. I need new batteries and someone to reprogram the door."

"I am not able to get on a ladder to clean my gutters. I need someone to clean my gutters. "

"Mopping and vacuuming is too difficult for me now. I need a regular cleaning person."

"The grass grows faster than I can mow it in the summer. I need a regular lawn service to keep it looking nice."

"The windows are dirty and I can't reach them. I need my windows washed in the spring and fall."

"The newspapers collect every week and they get too heavy to carry out to the street or to lift into the recycling bin. I need someone to help me."

"My garage is filled with things I can't use anymore and I don't have the energy to go through everything and clean it out. I need someone to clean the garage."

"I hurt my back shoveling snow last winter; I just can't do it anymore. I need some responsible person to shovel whenever it is needed."

"My garden is turning to seed. I need someone to remove plants I can't take care of and to add plants that require little maintenance."

"I am afraid to drive to the grocery store anymore. I need someone to pick up groceries for me or take me to the store."

"I get lonely now and then. It would be nice if (my daughter) and her husband could come for dinner or take me out to dinner at least once a week."

"My records are a mess. My address book is out of date and my recipes are on random slips of paper in books, boxes and drawers. I would like a new address book and recipe box and someone to help me copy my addresses and recipes."

"I want to send a few holiday cards to out-of-town friends and relatives but my arthritis is bad and it is painful to write. I would like someone to address the cards for me."

"My books are taking over house and home and I can't lift heavy books any longer to pack them. I would like someone to box the books and take them to a charity."

"I don't drive very much but I like to keep it full of gas, running well and looking nice. I would like someone to take the car to the service station on a regular basis for gas, oil changes and cleaning."

"I keep forgetting how to send e-mail. I need someone to write down the steps for me."

"My computer doesn't work. I don't know if it is me or the computer. I need someone to look at it and let me know what is wrong."

"When I go to a doctor, I don't always understand or remember what the doctor says. I would like my son or daughter to go into the doctor's office with me."

"I have trouble swallowing large pills. I need a pill crusher."

"I am afraid I'm going to fall in the bathroom. I need handles installed on my tub, shower and near the toilet."

"My balance is not too good, and I'm afraid I'm going to fall and not be able to get to the phone or call for help. I need to know that someone is checking on me every day."

"I like to read about the medications I'm taking and the symptoms I'm having. I would like a Prescription Reference Guide and a Physician's Desk Reference."

"When I go to the hospital for surgery next month, I need someone to take care of my cats and water the plants."

"The Minnesota Twins have spring training while I am in Ft. Myers. I would like to go to a game."

"My golf game has gone south since my shoulder surgery. I would like to take a golf lesson to see if I can improve my drive."

"My doctor said I should exercise in the water. He recommended using water weights. I can't find any locally but would like someone to find them for me."

"After my heart attack, the doctor told me to walk regularly but I don't have any good walking shoes. I need someone to take me shopping to find a pair."

"I would enjoy seeing my grandchildren having fun at Disneyworld. I would love to go along on a trip with the family."

"I go to the Senior Center and work-out on the Wii... but I would like one of my own."

"Now that I am retired, I enjoy painting still-life and landscapes. I would like some acrylic paints, brushes and canvases."

"When I learned Bridge, the bidding rules were defined by Goren. Now, the ACBL bidding conventions are used and I need to learn them. I would like the ACBL Bridge Series Bidding book."

"I served in World War II and admired Winston Churchill. Now that I am retired, I would like to read his six-book history of the war."

"A ticket to a play would be a nice gift."

"I like to go to the movies with my friends. A movie pass would be a nice gift."

Most seniors have accumulated enough "stuff" over the years. Most want the gift of your time and attention to let them know you care. To make these "gifts of time" extra special, create an actual "certificate" that you can wrap up in a fancy box. You could even offer certificates for a category of services. Here are some ideas:

- **Technology Help** – Show grandparents how to use email, upload pictures, download music, set up a record-keeping system for bills, or send cell phone texts.

- **Outdoor Chores** – Wash the car, clean the gutters, rake leaves, or shovel snow.
- **Indoor Chores** – Clean the house or a few rooms, change smoke detector batteries, bring in wood for the fireplace, clean out the refrigerator, or water the plants.
- **Run Errands** – Offer to drive to the store, post office or on other errands. Or, schedule an afternoon of shopping for fun.
- **Recipe Sharing Day** – Pick a day to spend together learning family recipes. Don't risk losing these precious traditions forever.
- **Video Memories Day**– Spend an afternoon “interviewing” your aging parent or grandparent and capture the conversation on videotape for future generations to enjoy.
- **Scrapbooking Day** – Go through old family pictures together and organize them into albums or scrapbooks. You'll inevitably spend the time-sharing memories, too.
- **“Your Choice Day”** – Suggest a day to sit together and play cards, watch television, see a movie or whatever else your parent or grandparent wants to do. Remember, the gift is your time and attention.

There is one gift in particular that will show how much you really care – the development of an emergency plan. What would happen in the event of a family emergency? What would your aging parent do? Where would she go? What would he bring? Who would she call? There are several scenarios to consider, but the important thing is to think through emergencies before they occur, so everyone knows

what to do. Develop a plan and then post it by the phone and share it with family and caring neighbors – whoever may play a part in caring for your family members in an emergency situation.

For a free guide: **Family Disaster Planning 101**, visit KeepingInTouchSolutions.com.

Get Everyone on the Same Page

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”

– Tony Robbins

Now that you have put careful consideration into the guest list, the accommodations, the food, the activities, and the gifts, you'll need to communicate the plan, preferably in writing, to your family members well in advance of the holiday. We're not talking about a formal memo to the board of directors here, just a simple, heart-felt letter inviting everyone to what may be the first of a long tradition of enjoyable family holiday get-togethers.

Explain why you are “taking the bull by the horns” this year (and, no, you shouldn't say “because we all remember what a miserable time we had at Aunt Mildred's last year!”), and how you hope with everyone's help, the holiday can truly be a wonderful experience for the entire family.

Give each family member the responsibility of making travel and lodging reservations (offer your home to out of town guests, if appropriate) and for arriving on time. You shouldn't include a complete schedule of activities, but be clear on what time you'd like everyone to arrive. You might include “Dinner will be served at 6:00PM,” not for guests who want to dine

and dash, but for seniors or others with special dietary needs who must plan their daily meals around medications, etc.

If you've decided on a pitch-in meal, you might want to include a list of who is bringing each item. That way, if Cousin Fran really wants to bring the cranberry sauce, she can take it upon herself to call the family member the dish is assigned to and trade.

It's also important to remember that so many people these days have multiple family obligations during holiday times. In your letter, you might state that while you understand that not everyone will be able to make it, your hope is that each person will have a beautiful and safe holiday wherever they may be. Include an RSVP, and when you speak to relatives that cannot attend, discuss the possibility of other dates that might work better next year. You won't be able to accommodate everyone, but it certainly feels good to know that your family doesn't want you to stress about choosing between one family or another.

<p><i>These days I'm amazed when we are able to pull everyone together for even one meal!</i></p>	
<p><i>I understand that my daughter has obligations to her husband's family, too. I don't want her to feel pressured to choose. I wish there was a good way to juggle it all.</i></p>	
<p><i>Mom always wants us to be at her house Christmas morning to open presents and have a big brunch, but now that we have our own child, we really want to spend Christmas morning at home and start our own traditions. But I don't want to hurt Mom's feelings...</i></p>	

Summary

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

– Serenity Prayer

Make this holiday season about creating wonderful memories for every generation that will last a lifetime. Start by defining your idea of family. Does it include friends, neighbors or others who might not have relatives nearby? Once you know who's coming, you can better plan for their needs and expectations when they arrive.

Make a simple plan and schedule. When will the get-together occur, where, what will you eat, who will help with the preparations, what activities will help keep everyone engaged, what options can you offer for overnight accommodations, what can be done to make "special needs" relatives feel involved and comfortable, and how should gift-giving be handled. Once you've determined the plan, communicate it to the family. Don't forget to express how excited you are about the holiday get-together and how you'd really like to start (or continue) a tradition of creating lasting holiday memories.

No matter how carefully you've planned and communicated, there will likely always be at least one "difficult" family member, but don't sweat it. Your efforts will not only allow you to see the family you don't see enough, but also connect with them perhaps in ways you haven't before.

Planning Checklists

PLAN

- Put your plan in writing.*
- Keep the plan simple!!!*
- Recall what made previous family get-togethers fun, and include them in the plan.*
- Recall what caused problems at previous family get-togethers, and omit them from the plan.*
- Minimize the amount of work you or others need to do.*
- Minimize the amount of money you or others must spend.*
- Arrange activities so that family members have an opportunity to “get away” to pursue their own activities.*
- Construct a menu that considers dietary restrictions and provide substitutes, where possible, for alcohol, rich desserts and fatty foods.*
- Arrange to have large meals catered or go to a restaurant.*
- Identify a hotel or motel for out-of-town family members.*
- Suggest that gifts for adults be restricted to handmade gifts or service certificates.*
- Communicate the plan to all family members.*

PLAN FOR SENIOR FAMILY MEMBERS ...

- Set aside one "quiet" room for seniors who may be overwhelmed by noise and activity.*
- Allow time for napping.*
- Assure that seniors continue to take their medications on schedule.*
- Identify one or more family members who can be responsible for assuring the comfort and safety of seniors.*
- Include seniors in the activities and conversation whenever possible.*
- Encourage seniors to relate stories from their youth.*
- Encourage children to entertain the family with games, music, drama or sports.*
- Avoid embarrassing seniors by reminding them that they have repeated a story or that they don't remember an event or person.*

GIFTS IDEAS FOR SENIORS

- Clean their gutters.*
- Clean their house or find a reliable cleaning service.*
- Mow the grass or find a regular lawn service.*
- Wash the windows or find a window washing service.*
- Replace light bulbs, fix faucet leaks, clean furnace filters or find a handyperson.*
- Collect recyclable materials on a regular basis.*
- Clean their garage.*
- Shovel snow or find a responsible snow-removal service.*
- Work in their garden or find a reputable landscape service.*
- Pick up and deliver their groceries, arrange grocery delivery or take them grocery shopping.*
- Assist in getting rid of their unwanted items.*

- Assist them in lifting boxes, and furniture.*
- Make arrangements for stairway, driveway, roof, flooring, ceiling and wall repair.*
- Bring them breakfast, lunch or dinner or take them out to a restaurant on a regular basis.*
- Take them clothes shopping or pleasure-shopping.*
- Organize their addresses, recipes, etc.*
- Organize their financial records.*
- Buy stamps and address and mail their holiday cards.*
- Maintain their automobile.*
- Help them with computer problems.*
- Help them learn to use the computer.*
- Compile a medical history for them ... names and addresses of their doctors, birth dates, emergency contacts, allergies, advance directives, major medical problems, list of medications and supplements, insurance information, prior surgeries and major illnesses, religious beliefs.*
- Take them to the doctor and listen to what the doctor has to say.*
- Install safety handles in their bathroom.*
- Safety-check the house and make necessary adjustments.*
- Provide pill crushers, large-clocks, night lights and other convenience items.*
- Contact them every day or arrange for someone else to contact them.*
- Organize their prescription drugs and, if necessary, monitor their usage.*
- Take them to a baseball game, a football game or a favorite sports event.*
- Accompany them to a movie, the theater, a museum or other cultural event.*
- Pay for lessons for a favorite sport (e.g. golf) or hobby.*

- Take them to a theme park with the family.*
- Replace their electronic device controllers with simple ones with large numbers.*
- Give them a membership in a fitness center and/or buy sports equipment such as walking shoes, water weights, Wii Fit, etc.*
- Give them materials for their hobbies (wood working, painting, knitting, fishing).*
- Add a piece to their collection of "collectibles."*
- Buy a book you know they will enjoy and haven't read.*
- Make or order a calendar with their children and grandchildren pictured for each month.*
- Join them in sorting through family photographs and make a scrapbook.*
- Give nicely framed photographs or a photographic collage of family members.*
- Give them a subscription to their favorite magazine.*
- Give them jigsaw puzzles or crosswords, Sudoku, or logic puzzle books.*
- Present them with a gift certificate for a massage, hair styling or manicure.*
- Make a family DVD or slide show for them.*

Healthy Holiday Eating

Avoid making the food the focus of the season.

Visit family or friends, go caroling, drive around to see the holiday light displays or just window shop.

If you gain 500 calories each day between Thanksgiving and New Years, you will go up one extra clothing size. Since most of us would rather NOT do that, here are some tips to help you maintain your weight through the holiday season.

Make a holiday eating plan including:

- If you decide to eat too much, just pick a few occasions for over-eating, not every day.
- If it's not your favorite food, don't eat it!
- No second helpings!
- Eat the foods that you really enjoy first.
- Give leftovers away.
- Stay away from the food table.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Exercise 10 minutes more on days when you plan to eat more.
- For pitch-ins, bring something healthy.
- Clean up immediately and put food away (to limit day-long grazing).
- Control portion size (eat a little of things not a lot).
- Pay attention to what you eat.
- If something is placed in front of you, move it away quickly.

- Eat something before you go to the party.
- Don't let yourself get too tired, hungry or lonely.
- Stoop when you are full.
- Enjoy each bite.
- Eat slowly.
- Think of a phrase for turning down food and drink graciously.
- If you choose to eat, avoid feeling guilty. Enjoy the delicious food and get healthier eating the next day. Guilt will only lead to more bad eating habits.
- Use smaller plates.

Source: Elaine Gaither, YourParentPartner.com.

Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress

The holidays are a blessed time for reflection of our inner spiritual feelings. This year, you can commit to making the season different. Instead of the hustle and bustle mentality, you can consciously bring balance, warmth, harmony and love into your life by doing less. Here are some ideas to help you have the best holiday season.

Get Real!

- Realize that holiday stress is real!
- Check your expectations – it may be time to change your idea of a perfect holiday.
- Accept family members as they are (they are not likely to change over the holidays).
- Go with the flow – you don't have to be in charge!

Manage Your Time / Plan Ahead

- Decide what is most important to you and make sure you do those things first.
- Make a list before you shop (and bring the list with you).
- Shop early and at off-peak times.
- Consider shopping via the Internet.
- Allow extra time for all activities.

Delegate

- Ask for help from family members with shopping, cleaning, decorating, wrapping, etc.

Create New Traditions

- This may be a good year to talk to the people you usually buy gifts for and decide to do something differently.
- Spend time together or volunteer somewhere.
- If you exchange gifts, set limits.
- If you lost someone significant in your life since the last holiday season, find someone and talk about your feelings.

Be Kind to Yourself

- Get enough sleep
- Surround yourself with supportive people.
- Use positive self-talk when you are at a stop-light or traffic jam; take deep breaths and put things into perspective.
- Bring a book to pass the time you'll likely spend in long lines.

Make It Meaningful

- Adopt a family through church, school or local charity.
- Invite others to share holiday meals with you.
- Volunteer in the community.

Source: Elaine Gaither, YourParentPartner.com.

Holidays / Observances

Holiday	2013	2014	2015
New Year's Day	01/01	01/01	01/01
Martin Luther King Day	01/21	01/20	01/19
Presidents Day	02/18	02/17	02/16
Good Friday	03/29	04/18	04/03
Easter	03/31	04/20	04/05
Mothers Day	05/12	05/11	05/10
Memorial Day	05/27	05/26	05/25
Father's Day	06/16	06/15	06/21
July 4th	07/04	07/04	07/04
Labor Day	09/02	09/01	09/07
Grandparent's Day	09/08	09/07	09/13
Rosh Hashanah	09/05	09/25	09/14
Yom Kippur	09/14	10/04	09/23
Columbus Day	10/14	10/13	10/12
Veteran's Day	11/11	11/11	11/11
Thanksgiving	11/28	11/27	11/26
Chanukah	11/28	12/17	12/07
Christmas	12/25	12/25	12/25
Kwanzaa	12/26	12/26	12/26

Bonus Gifts

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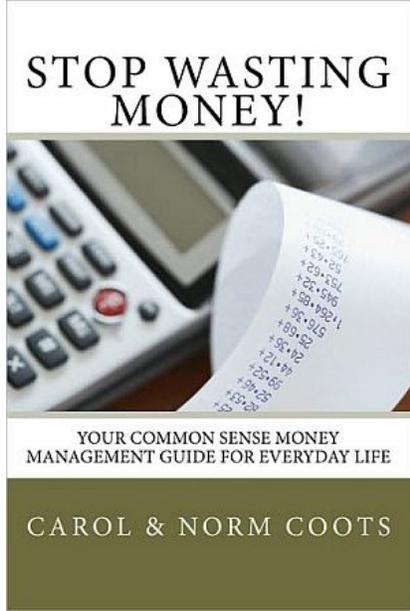
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