

For weekly News Column

Lisa A. Wallace

University of Missouri Extension

100 West Franklin

Clinton, MO 64735

(660) 885-5556



Holidays, Traditions and Stress

This is a special year for us. My parents and in-laws have been gone for seven years and this will be the first time since their passing that we will have extended family at our house for Christmas. I am excited to have them in Clinton and pleased that we won't have to travel.

However, I am finding the drawback to having everyone here. As I write, our Christmas family plans are evolving. Some family members who thought they would be here are emailing with different schedules. And some are saying they will not stay as long. As a person who makes a lot of plans, these last-minute changes stress me out.

Stress occurs when reality doesn't meet our expectations. I have a set of expectations of how the holiday gathering at my house will happen and two days before guests arrive, plans are changing.

I take a deep breath, alter the menu a bit and try to remind myself that this season is about family, friends and fellowship. It's not about "the day" or a certain amount of time that we spend together. It's about the quality of the time and the traditions we continue.

It's the traditions of having certain food, singing carols together, wrapping presents in a special box or passing around a box of special chocolates that makes your family unique. It's those traditions that give your family an identity and helps your children and grandchildren develop memories.

Most of us cannot remember what we received for our sixth Christmas or our tenth Christmas but we can remember who we were with through the years and when it snowed and how big the snow fort was. It's the memories of the relationships that make the memories and keep the traditions alive.

Does it matter that you are not physically together on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day "proper?" No, not really. It matters that you are together at some time, to enjoy each other and have fun building memories.

Remember your neighbors and friends who may be alone or apart from family this holiday. Invite them in, share your meal and reminisce about Christmases they remember.

Must all traditions be continued? As you go through the holidays, think about what needs to be changed. I know a lot of families no longer send Christmas cards. Perhaps the tradition of grandma preparing the meal have changed to a potluck meal or needs to be changed.

Sometimes traditions can get in the way of modern plans and changes need to be made. Just because you've always done something a certain way doesn't mean that it will always be done that way. But, let me caution you, don't just assume you can change it; talk with everyone involved to make the change.

I hope you find time to relax and enjoy the holidays with your family and friends. And remember, take a deep breath if your expectations don't meet reality.

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