

## **HOLIDAYS CAN BE A SOURCE OF FAMILY STRESS**

The holiday season is a time when family love, harmony, and togetherness are fostered by songs, advertisements, and the media. While this may come true for some families, the holidays can also be a period of increased family stress.

The increased pressures families experience during this time of the year are demonstrated by research that finds increased family violence during the holiday period.

Families experience stress whenever they undergo change. During the holiday season many of the routines families develop are disrupted. Children are home from school. Grandparents and other relatives may be coming to visit or the family may be traveling to visit them. Many special events and activities are planned. Adjusting to these changes can produce stress.

Other factors may also contribute to the stress. This is a time of increased financial burden for the family. Christmas presents and other seasonal gifts can take a giant toll on the family's resources.

If the family cannot afford to buy the gifts it desires, the awareness of its financial shortcomings can cause tremendous stress. The holiday season presents a yearly opportunity for the family to see how it compares to neighbors and friends in terms of financial resources.

Idealized images of family harmony are found everywhere during the holidays. Television specials and commercials show the whole family gathered around the tree singing carols. A family with ongoing conflict may see this in sharp contrast to its own situation.

Family members can take a number of steps to cope with the stress associated with the holidays. The first thing to do is try to avoid what stress researchers call "stressor pile-up." Stressor pile-up occurs when a family experiences a number of different events that disrupt family routines within a limited period of time.

If your family is going to a child's holiday program on Saturday morning and the grandparents are scheduled to arrive from Florida on Sunday, think twice before inviting the families of two co-workers to your home for dinner Saturday night. While it might be nice to see the people during the holidays, both you and your friends may enjoy an evening together more in late January when everyone's schedules are less hectic.

Research has found that families in which roles are interchangeable in regards to child-care, homemaking, recreation, and many other activities are best equipped to cope with stress.

This means that when events are hectic and the baby needs to be changed or dinner needs to go in the oven, whoever is available will perform the tasks regardless of traditional expectations of whose role it is to do them.

While it is sometimes hard to do in our materialistic society, people need to remind themselves that the true value of the holidays is not measured in terms of how much money is spent or how many gifts are received.

People also need to have realistic expectations about what the holidays will be like. Just because your family's holidays are not perfect like those portrayed in the media doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your family.

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<http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/holiday2003/HolidaysCanBeaSourceofFamilyStress.htm>