December 10, 2007

Happy Holidays to You,

Believe it or not, as I write this, there are only 22 more days until Christmas! And by the time you get this, there will be just a few days left to shop, plan meals, get those last-minute decorations up, and spend time with family before Christmas will be over and we will start all over again.

This season of the year reminds us of many things. To some, it is a happy time; to others, it can be a very sad time. Stress, finances, family separations, etc., make it difficult to be happy. I have put together a few articles that may help you as you think about this season of the year and what is important to you and your family.

Please make plans to join us December 19, for our Christmas Luncheon. We will spend some time talking about what is important to us and sharing our own traditions.

In the spirit of Christmas,

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Holiday Traditions Evolve As Families Grow

The holidays bring traditions that help keep families strong, build a family history, and make the holidays enjoyable and memorable.

Let's look at holiday traditions over the life span. Young couples have the fun, and perhaps challenge, of beginning new traditions. No two families have identical traditions, so individuals could bring far different traditions into a marriage. Or there could be a disagreement about even the simplest of things such as the timing of decorating or gift giving. The keys are communication, compromise, and creativity in blending traditions from families of both individuals. One example might be coming up with a different time to put up decorations. For families with young children, new traditions are added in to accommodate a growing family. It's important to establish the family's traditions and not depend on the traditions of the extended family. Once something is done during the holidays, it has the potential to be a tradition forever. Young parents will want to carefully consider what traditions are started with young children. Is it something you will want to do every year?

As the family grows, traditions also grow and evolve. School-age children will increasingly be able to help with holiday preparations. Decorating the house or helping to make goodies might be high on the list. Teens may lend their own abilities to traditions. For instance, they might take over writing the annual family Christmas letter, adding in pictures and graphics.

Families evolve in numerous ways over the years. Although it might seem a contradiction, families will want to ask themselves whether long-standing family traditions need to change to accommodate older grandparents or great-grandparents
Does having a large family celebration at the grandparent's home really work when grandpa hasn't been feeling well? Changes such as a separation, divorce, or death in the family also necessitate rethinking some traditions.

As families change, so may gift-giving traditions. What worked for the immediate family might not continue to work for the extended family. Distance, financial situations, and time might all play a factor in family members no longer being enthusiastic about gift giving. Again, communication, compromise, and creativity might be needed to come up with a different way to exchange gifts.

Traditions are slow to change, and that's okay. Holiday traditions are inextricably bound up with the history and the strength of families. If in doubt about your ability or energy to carry on a tradition, or if you have concerns about other family members, make it a point to talk about it with other family members during the upcoming holidays. Talking about it this year may give people time to think about it and prepare for a change next year. It could be time for a new holiday tradition.

**Holiday Stress**

For many, though the holidays are a time of celebration, they can also be a time of stress. If you find yourself trapped by negative holiday stress, consider the following:

**Your belief system:**

- What is of major importance to you this holiday?
- What five ingredients are essential for your holiday to be meaningful?
- What do these ingredients indicate is of major importance to you this holiday?
- How do you hope to accomplish it?
- If that doesn't work/happen, how else could you meet the need -- or what would be a satisfactory substitute?

**Ask for what you want:**

- If you're lonely, ask someone to share your celebration -- or ask to share in someone else's.
- If you love surprises, let people know.
- If you need time alone in the midst of togetherness, say so.

**Set priorities:**

- List all the things you want to accomplish before/during the holidays.
- Do unpleasant activities quickly and as painlessly as possible.
- Keep some of the activities you most enjoy for yourself.

**Turn obligations into energizers:**

- If your holiday card list conjures up an image of drudgery, write a compliment to each friend, rather than a history of the past year.
- Pack up your cards and do them at your favorite restaurant or coffee shop.

**Create a treasured holiday:**

- Make positive contact with others.
- Give meaningful gifts -- give presents and give your presence.
- Take care of yourself. Don't overeat or overdrink. Exercise regularly, and protect your physical energy by allowing space for rejuvenation.
- Laugh. Practice seeing the humor in your holiday dilemmas. Keep a joke book around or go to a funny movie. Do something outrageous each day (Adapted from Tubesing, et. al., 1996).

...And have a happy holiday season!

**School Dates to Remember**

January 15-18, 2008 - High School Exams
January 21, 2008 - Martin Luther King Holiday
January 22-23, 2008 - Teachers’ Workdays