

Communicating Through Holiday Stress

December 2012

Christmastime isn't always a winter wonderland. Along with the jingle bells and silent nights comes the stress of the holiday rush. Visiting family, financial burdens and the overload of commitments can cause us stress. This stress, whether intentional or not, has an effect on our relationships. No need to panic, with these few easy tips on healthy communication, the lights can start twinkling again,

Don't make assumptions

Your budget may be a bit tight this year, share that with your family and friends. They may be in the same boat and like you, they may want to put a limit on what to spend, or avoid purchasing gifts altogether. You may feel too overwhelmed to host Christmas dinner. Again, share that with those around you; maybe someone else has interest in hosting? The point is you may be able to eliminate any stress you may have by letting go of your assumptions on how others may think or feel. If you're not sure what's up...ask! Most family and friends have your back and want to help.

Listen

Be an active listener. The majority of conflicts happen because of one missing piece of information. Take the time to listen to what others are saying. For Example, if asking your spouse to hang the Christmas lights turns into a huge fight, instead of escalating the conflict, listen to the reasons why they want to wait. Maybe they had a bad day, maybe they are tired, or maybe they had plans to curl on the couch to read a book. Listening to others helps us to understand where they're coming from and eliminate our own stress.

Talk

Part of effective communication is sharing your thoughts and feelings. Use "I" statements to share with others that you are stressed and the reason causing it. I statements allow you to take ownership for your feelings without placing blame on the other person. For example you are furious at your co-worker for begging you to plan the work Christmas party every year, promising she will help, but she never does. An effective "I" statement could be, "I feel over-whelmed planning this party by myself, I really



could use some help.” This simple tool of owning your feelings can be a huge stress eliminator.

Ask for Help

Christmas parties, holiday shopping combined with our regular schedules can put us on overload. Reach out and ask your family and friends for help. You can't assume that others will know what you are feeling stressed over. Here are a few suggestions that might help; ask another parent to share driving the kids to a Christmas party, reach out to your family and ask if everyone can bring a dish for dinner, instead of you doing it all, include the children when making plans so there are no surprises, Asking for help and sharing responsibilities can help to make the holidays less stressful for all.

The holidays can provide the opportunity to learn and share communication skills. Being open to recognizing that you are stressed is the first step in productive communication. So, if you share your feelings and listen to the feelings of others before long, you'll be sharing in all the joy the holiday season can bring.