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IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

HOW TO LET GO OF HOLIDAY EXPECTATIONS

Popular culture reinforces high-stakes ideas about the holiday season, like “Everyone loves each other this time of year,” and “If I don’t get this holiday right, I’m failing my family.” Our expectations can be extremely high. The holidays do have the potential to be a time when we share in each other’s joy. But rather than letting these common beliefs govern how you feel, try replacing them with some different practices so that you can appreciate the holidays as they are, not as you think they “should” be.

Stressful Belief #1: My family should get along during the holidays. The need for people to treat each other and us well around the holidays can be intense, leaving us disappointed, resentful, and hurt if things don’t go as we would like.

Try this: Seek out loving friendship. Be proactive about filling the well of connection for yourself. Reach out to a good friend and set a date to get together. The event doesn’t have to be “special” – the relationship is what matters.

Stressful Belief #2: I must make this the “perfect” holiday. All this belief does is drive us to distraction and keep us from appreciating the holidays we’ve actually got.

Try this: Catch your thoughts. If you find yourself starting to wish for perfection, observe the ticker tape of your thoughts. Listen for phrases like “I’m the only one who can do this,” or “If I don’t get this right, it will be ruined.” Notice how these thoughts feel, and then challenge them. Say to yourself, “It doesn’t make sense in my life to do that anymore. Perfection isn’t the goal.” Then focus on your breath. Tuning into our physical sensations keeps us connected to the present moment.

Stressful Belief #3: I should give and get the perfect gifts. Presents take on extraordinary weight this time of year. Even if we find what we think is the “perfect” gift for someone, there’s no guarantee the recipient will respond the way we want.

Try this: Aim for gratitude. Every morning or evening, write down three to five things you’re grateful for. Send a thank-you text or email to someone who did something nice for you recently. When we make a gratitude practice and express it to others, we reinforce our own well-being. Then we can put holiday gift-giving in perspective.

Source: “3 Holiday Expectations That Are Making You Crazy (And How to Change Them),” by Jan Bruce, Huffington Post, 12/3/2013, www.huffingtonpost.com.

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