




Giving Grace

Compassion During the Holiday Season and Minimizing Stress



The holidays are here. Add a dash of planning stress, a pinch of celebration excess, a smidgeon of strained family relationships, and a heaping serving of COVID pandemic-related concerns and you may have a recipe for a rough holiday. But what if we approached holidays differently? What if we planned, were proactive and created a feeling of comfort and well-being, instead of being reactive and turning into a depressed, resentful grinch? Follow these tips to help you learn to be more compassionate and give grace, to each other and to ourselves.

-  **Create a Recipe for Success:** Plan, plan, plan. This doesn't mean overwhelming yourself with a "To do list" the length a holiday drugstore receipt. It means be proactive and take care of things early if possible, delegate responsibilities to others (yes, accept help!) and scale down on your usual plans. This will help reserve precious energy for the truly hard things.
-  **Manage Expectations:** Don't assume things will work themselves out. Can you avoid sensitive topic landmines? Have a thoughtful discussion with your family/kids on how the holidays may look different this year and ask for their suggestions! Be honest and communicate with family and friends about what you can, and cannot, do. Your less resentful self will thank you later and you will have more energy to expend on compassion, patience and grace giving!
-  **Maintain Traditions:** Change is hard. We fight against it. But we must adapt to things we can't control (pandemic stressors) and then maintain the fun, loving and unique traditions that create fond memories and that make your family special.



Keep it real: The holidays shouldn't be about perfection, being hyper-critical of yourself, or being so stressed you can't enjoy the day or your family. Children and our significant others don't enjoy seeing someone they love so stressed out, angry or exhausted. What's important and what isn't? Stick to the basics and remember "good enough" really is good enough.



Do Unto Others: Be a good role model for your children and those around you. How would you like your children and loved ones to experience the holidays, treat others, or remember YOU? They feel your energy, they learn from how you handle yourself and interact with others, and will most likely either continue your ways, or reject them if they don't bring joy.



Pay It Forward: Offer up kindness and positive energy to the universe. Hold in that critical remark about a family member, co-worker or stranger in the store. Let that car cut in front of you in traffic. Donate to your favorite charity, or volunteer, as a family. Check in on a lonely neighbor or older family member and bring food. Let that grievance you're holding onto go.



Stay Positive: Create a personal mantra to bring your mind back to a positive space when it wanders into negativity or something frustrating occurs. Something like, "I am detaching from negativity." Or, "I choose to radiate happiness and love." Or, "I am more powerful than my pain." Maybe your positive outlook will be contagious to those around you! Learn to go with the flow.



Uncle Scrooge: Learn to cut a family member some slack. As they say, you never know what is going on behind closed doors and perhaps they, too, are really struggling. Showing grace to difficult family members can start the healing process and improve family situations. Even if nothing improves outwardly that we can see, there are still benefits, like knowing we did the right thing by extending a hand, allows us to grow. Grace isn't only for the person it's extended to; it's also for the giver.



No Slack to Give? Dealing with difficult family situations and toxic family members can increase stress significantly, feel scary, cause extreme anxiety, or be downright painful. Decide if you can cut out, or completely avoid really problematic family members. And if not, learn to say no, set appropriate boundaries and stick with them, and not feel guilty about it. If you don't try, the dysfunctional, or stressful, patterns will continue year after year.



Team Compassion: Turn towards your spouse or significant other. It's easier to face difficult situations and people with someone by our side. Have a conversation with your loved one and let them know what you need. No one is a mind reader, nor should they be expected to guess what you are feeling or what you need. Show your spouse or significant other grace by opening up, sharing, and letting them in.



Newly Divorced: Think “Child-centered” when you start to struggle with your ex or their family members. Aiming for minimal conflict holiday is easier when we show compassion and give grace to those who we may feel do not deserve it. Do not make the holidays a battleground full of conflict for your children. Remember, you can’t control others’ behaviors, you can only control the way you react to them.



Compassion for One: Practice self-care and give yourself grace. We sometimes eat more, drink more alcohol, and neglect ourselves. We’re supposed to be enjoying the holidays, but instead we may dread them and may often feel terrible due to our normal mental and physical health routines being out of whack. Take a break, meditate, eat healthy some days, exercise often, connect with good friends, enjoy some peace and quiet, and don’t forget what you’ve learned here. If we bring some handy tools and some positive perspective shifts to our holiday tables this year, we can deal with difficult situations and difficult people more directly and effectively. Remember, showing others grace and compassion, makes things easier on you too!

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