



## COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

### **Avoiding the Holiday Blues:** **How to Create Stress-Free Holiday Season**

*“If you cannot find peace within yourself, you will never find it anywhere else.” ~ Marvin Gaye*

The holiday season is traditionally seen as the most festive, best time of the year. For some people, this is cause for excitement. For others, it can bring up anxiety, depression, or a feeling of being overwhelmed. As a society, we view the holiday season as a joyous time. On an individual basis, however, many factors play a role in creating a “less than joyous” time of year. One factor is memory. If we’ve had disappointing holidays in the past, our anticipation of this year’s festivities could be less than stellar. The ups-and-downs of the previous year can also play a role in our reaction. Loss of a loved one, divorce/separation, financial stress, moving, and physical illness are among the most stressful experiences we can have. If you experience one or more of these in the last year, your nervous system might be overwhelmed by the intensity of the holiday season.

In addition to our past experiences playing a role, it often seems as if holiday seasons have become busier and more stressful. Although it’s not actually the holidays themselves that are more stressful, it’s our lives that are busier and more anxiety producing. Our everyday stressors, such as working long hours, fighting traffic, making sure the kids are in the right place at the right time, caring for aging parents, going to doctors’ visits, trying to make time for exercise and healthy eating, paying bills, making time to see friends, etc., are compounded when the tasks of preparing for the holidays are added. What are these added holiday tasks? Shopping for gifts and special meals, cleaning the house, putting up the holiday decorations, making travel plans, packing for travel, and actually traveling. Any added responsibility to our already overloaded plate can impact our mental, emotional, and physical health. What’s the solution? Find some inner peace this season.

1. **Lower your expectations.** Or get rid of them altogether. Rather than planning everything and putting yourself in charge of the holiday season, work with your friends and family members to make collaborative decisions. When we have rigid expectations of how things “should” go, we are almost always let down. Don’t sabotage this holiday season by setting unrealistic goals for yourself or anyone else.
2. **Don’t underestimate the time it will take to complete holiday tasks.** Shopping, cleaning, cooking, and decorating are not quick and easy tasks, especially when many other people have the same type of plans. Rather than creating situations where you are

running around like a “chicken with its head cut off” because you double-booked your time, create a timeline for yourself for all the things you need to accomplish. Add at least 30-60 minutes to each one. Consider the best time to accomplish your tasks that work for you rather than against you. Perhaps doing some cooking after the kids have gone to bed, or shopping in the evening during the week rather than on the weekend. Take a few moments to plan your next day’s activities.

3. **Remind yourself to SLOW DOWN.** When you find your mind or body racing around, or if you are getting agitated, angry, or overwhelmed, remember to breathe. Everything will get done, and everything will be okay. Say a soothing mantra to yourself, such as “breath in calm, breath out smile,” or go outside to take a walk. Rather than focusing on what needs to get done, focus on the people around you; be present in the moment and enjoy it!
4. **Keep up your self-care!** Generally speaking, when we are busy and stressed out, we start neglecting the very tools that help us get through stressful times unscathed: getting enough sleep, eating regularly, drinking enough water, and exercising. These practices seem so simple, but they can have profoundly positive results; during the holiday season, it just takes a little extra discipline and self-care to do them!

Unfortunately, life will not slow down for you. You can, however, use your own inner resources to find peace within yourself despite the fast paced holiday season! Start now by taking a deep breath and imagining how lovely the holiday season will be with a little mental preparation.

*By Sarah Myers, JD, LMFT, LAC*  
*Clinical Director, Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program*  
*December 2014*  
© Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program, 2017

Your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program provides free and confidential services for judges, lawyers, and law students. If you need resources for ANY issue that is compromising your ability to be a productive member of the legal community, or if there is someone you are concerned about, contact COLAP at (303) 986-3345. For more information about COLAP, please visit [www.coloradolap.org](http://www.coloradolap.org).