



THE INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES OF NORTH TEXAS

"helping achieve small miracles!"

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After the Holidays....

By Dr. Sandra W. Froese, LPC-S, © 2013. All rights reserved.

The holiday season of Christmas, Hanukkah (Festival of Lights), or Winter Solstice has come and gone. Among the busyness of the season and family time, comes laughter and joy, but also heartbreak leading to moderate or severe depression.

With the exchange of gifts comes the worry, "Does it fit?" "Does he like it?" "Did I spend enough?" "Did I spend too little?" And, "Did I treat every family member fairly?" "Did some think they received less than others?"

The holiday dinner brings on even more stress. "Did I prepare enough food?" "I forgot that Susie has allergies and can't eat anything that contains dairy." "The Twice-Baked Potatoes were lukewarm and not hot enough." "Why did the pie crust get so soggy?"

At every family gathering old hurts and new issues are brought into a sharper focus. The grandkids fuss because they did not receive what they wanted. The daughter-in-law pouts because she wanted to spend Christmas with her family. The son incessantly complains that he can't find work that pays well enough to earn a decent living and repay his student loans.

The daughter, who is contemplating a divorce, worries that a split from her husband will undo the children. Grandma, who is 85 years young, avoids any subject of selling her home and moving to assisted living. Dad is worried about losing his retirement pension when his company merges with another corporation. And, poor Mom--she is physically exhausted from shopping, wrapping, cooking, washing and cleaning. Does any of this sound like your family? Downright depressing, isn't it?

The holidays come and go, but there is no need to feel bereft and empty. The holidays give us respite from a troubled world and ship-wrecked souls. The holidays are meant for a time of reconnection, contemplation and reconciliation. To help achieve balance, try a process called "reframing."

For every negative thought, examine it and determine if it is rational or even true. Turn the thought around and replace the negative thoughts with positive actions and thoughts. For the pouty daughter-in-law, give her a hug. Perhaps she feels displaced and misses being with her family. For the son who is complaining about not finding work, offer to introduce him to a co-worker who might give him some leads. For the daughter who is contemplating a divorce, encourage her to take her time before making a decision. And for Grandma, introduce her to an enthusiastic friend who loves the freedom she has living in an assisted living complex.

Dad needs to hear that he was prudent to set up a second retirement account in case his company pension was reduced or gone! And, Mom! She needs to hear compliments that she worked hard to make her family happy this holiday, and now she needs to schedule some "me" time for her such as going to a spa. There isn't much you can do about grand kids, except remember that they are someone else's responsibility. Reframing negative thoughts and replacing them with positive actions and thoughts are keys to good mental and emotional health. Contact a licensed professional counselor to help guide you through this process of change.

All of us at the Institute for Healthy Families of North Texas wish you and yours and a Happy New Year! For information and to learn more about our counseling services go to our website at www.texasicounselors.com or e-mail Dr. Sandra Froese at swfroese@sbcglobal.net.