



The Happier Parent **HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE**

Staying Whole When Everyone Wants
a Piece of You, and Some of Them Bite



No matter what you're celebrating or where, holidays mean you've got society, culture, history and family members knocking at your door, all telling you loud and clear what your festive season should look like and how you should behave and feel while it happens, not to mention what you should expect from your kids.

You've been soaking in that message for years now, which means you've internalized a grand vision of how this should go as well, coupled with a solid recognition that things rarely turn out as planned. Your father wants the meal to be gluten- and dairy-free, your children take off their matching sweaters and put on Elsa costumes, your Hong Kong clients really need a conference call and worst of all, it's the most wonderful time of the year, you feel anything but wonderful, and you've made sure everyone around you knows it.

That combo is a recipe for cranberry-pumpkin-sage-cinnamon-apple-streusel-deusel misery pie, which may be Starbucks' next Frappuccino recipe, but isn't something you need in your overstuffed fridge. What you do need is a mental re-set button, one that allows you toss aside everything you should, must or always do at the holidays, and do what matters instead.

Here's how to quit chasing the festive season you think you should have,
and choose instead to love the one you've got.



DISREGARD AND DISENGAGE

Everybody's got a holiday vision, and they're not all of sugarplums. If your brother's mental story stars him as the unappreciated, unloved middle child, or your aunt is the martyr who sacrifices all for family, your best bet is not to take a part in that movie. When she's following you around fussing that there won't be enough gluten-free food for your niece with celiac (even though your sister is perfectly happy) or he's commandeering your kitchen to make his famous apple pie hampered by your horrible apple peeler and the wrong kind of apples and why-don't-you-have-fresh-nutmeg, let them have their solo scenes.

If you must, you can enter the drama at a time of your choosing, but remember, some people don't want to be happy. You do. That may mean you need to stick to your own script this year.

ONE AT A TIME, *Please*

Your uncle wants to talk business. Your grandmother wants to empty the dishwasher for you, but can you just show her where the spoons go? And this whisk, and the plates, and the cups, and what is this tong thing? Your sister in law wants you to be as worried about the calories in the eggnog as she is, your partner wants you to help move the table into the family room and your toddler doesn't want you talk to anyone else, ever again as long as she lives. It's the holidays, you're surrounded by family and friends, and everyone wants a piece of you. It would be terrible to be alone and friendless this time of year, right? Alone and friendless, maybe in a nice hotel room with a remote control and room service...

Deep breaths. One at a time, full focus for whoever's in front of you, hugs when words don't seem to be enough. *Uncle Ray, can you help move this table? Baby, can you help great-grandma?* There may not be enough you to go around, but there's enough love for everybody.

DON'T PAY TWICE

Holidays can be tough, especially if you've lost someone this year or had some rough times. You don't have to feel happy about what happened, but if you're ready for some happiness, you can find in it the parts of your holiday you've always enjoyed. As Ellen Langer says, this terrible thing has already happened. It's already taken things from you. Don't throw everything else in after it. Don't pay twice. You still get to have joy.



Remind Yourself
**THIS IS WHERE YOU
WANT TO BE**

Maybe this isn't the perfect holiday season. But given what you've got – your existing family, your bank account, your job your community and your world – aren't you exactly where you want to be, doing what you want to do? Sure, a season in Hawaii sounds great, but you wouldn't want it if it meant leaving everything you love behind. Savor what's good about where you are. Soak it up. Make it yours.



Mantras

FOR HOLIDAY HAPPINESS

**NO IS YES
& YES IS NO**

So choose mindfully.

**IF IT ISN'T SOMETHING
YOU LOVE OR THAT
YOUR FAMILY LOVES,
DO SOMETHING ELSE.**

**DISREGARD
& DISENGAGE**

Then go find someone
happy to talk to.

**I AM WHERE I WANT
TO BE, DOING WHAT
I WANT TO DO.**



Yeah, everybody wants a piece of you. That's kind of nice, really. Just be sure to serve yourself first.

