

Dysfunctional Family Christmas: 6 Tips for Making the Holidays Functional

Written by admin

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Dysfunctional Family Christmas: 6 Tips for Making the Holidays Functional *by Karla Downing*



Are you dealing with a dysfunctional family Christmas? Use these 6 tips for making the holidays functional. Togetherness, love, family, tranquility, magic, unity, happiness, and gifts--We are told we should have all these things at Christmas and when we don't have them, we feel disappointed and despairing. Anything short of that ideal is painful and everything not right about our lives and relationships is exaggerated.

Christmas in my childhood home was wonderful and horrible. Wonderful, because we had a Christmas tree and lots of gifts; horrible, because there was always fighting at some point that ruined it. Christmas in my marriage was also wonderful and at times horrible. Wonderful, because we had fun traditions and family time; horrible, because when my husband didn't do what I needed him to do, there would be disappointment and tension.

Dysfunctional family Christmas' frequently have arguments, divisions, drinking, partying, excessive spending, lack of money, and many other problems. It may be division in your family, a difficult relative you hate to be around, crazy-making dynamics, aloneness, or reminders of loss. Whatever it is, the holidays tend to increase the sadness and stress associated with it.

Here are 6 tips you can use to help you with whatever relational stress you may be dealing with:

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1. Let Go of Expectations.

If you expect something that is unreasonable for your situation, you are setting yourself up to be hurt and then angry and resentful. If you set your ideals too high, you will fall. When you let go of expectations, you keep yourself from being disappointed. If you expect things to be imperfect, you won't be upset when they are and you will be happily surprised when they are better than you expected.

2. Let Go of Materialism.

Jesus was born in a manger. He didn't come, so we could buy everyone presents at Nordstrom's and rack up credit card debt. The reason for the season isn't material gifts for others; it's about the gift God gave us of his son.

There are many things you can do that are fun and inexpensive. Make sure you do things you enjoy. Be creative. Teach your kids that when you don't have money, you live within your means. Give yourself and your time to others, instead of spending money you don't have. And, receive openly and graciously what others give you without comparing the cost of their gifts with what you spent or whether or not you bought something for them.

3. Keep It Simple

Who said you have to do all the things that people do for the holidays? Don't buy into it; instead, decide what you like and don't like and only do what you want to do and enjoy. Give yourself permission to simplify in ways that make the holidays bearable and enjoyable for you. I get take-out for Christmas Eve dinner and eat it at home. I use paper plates for the Christmas Day family party and ask everyone to bring a dish. And, I've cut my gift list down to only parents and children. Don't let guilt control you and don't compare what you do to what others do. Just keep it simple for yourself.

4. Keep an Attitude of Gratitude

Focus on being grateful for the positive. Maybe your family is still dysfunctional, but you are getting healthy. Maybe you are having financial problems, but your family is together. Maybe, you aren't with your spouse, but have your children and the rest of your family. Maybe you have a few bad relationships, but lots of good ones. Maybe you don't have money, but you have good times together. Whatever is wrong and less than the ideal can be balanced by finding something else to be grateful for. Remember, you aren't the only one experiencing a less than perfect holiday.

5. Detach from Difficult People

Dysfunctional family dynamics are the worst part of the holidays. If you have to be around family members that are difficult, do it, but give yourself permission to leave when you need to leave. Don't get entangled in family stuff. Stay out of the middle of other people's relationships and don't try to fix other people. Instead of doing what you normally do, sit back and observe

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the dynamics in your family, as if you are an outside observer. Accept your family as they are and don't expect them to be different. Take care of yourself enough to have a good holiday and don't allow others to ruin it for you by their reactions, actions, moods, addictions, anger, and dysfunction.

6. Practice One Day at a Time

No matter how bad it is, Christmas is only one day of the year. You can make it through that one day.

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