

Families and the Holidays –Are We Having Fun Yet?

The holidays are upon us, and for most people their attention turns to gatherings of family and friends. For many, it is a time of reunion and joy. For some, spending time with family members isn't always a joyous experience.

Statistics tell us there is a rise in the incidences of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and risk of suicide during the holidays. WHY?

-UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:

Holidays are often built up by what we think they “**should be.**” We are influenced by how holidays are portrayed in movies, television, advertisements –the traditional Norman Rockwell calendars. We have a romance with thoughts of the “good old days” or having an “an old- fashion Christmas.” What we may really want is to return to simplicity or reduce our attachments to commercialism.

Stress and exhaustion make us vulnerable to conflict–saying or doing things we might regret later because emotions take over and rational thinking or behavior goes out the window.

WHAT CAN HELP:

- **Start with realistic expectations** –plan together, “What is the experience of this holiday that we want to create with each other?”
- **Focus on the Positive.** Don't over-do with entertaining, cooking or social commitments
- **Be accepting of others.** Keep an open mind, holidays are generally not a good time to point out others' deficits or be critical of your son's new hairstyle. Family disasters often start with an argument about something that is unrelated to the purpose of the gathering.
- **Be mindful of alcohol use.** When people drink excessively, they are more likely to say or do something which will hurt others.
- **Have a backup plan or activity to redirect the energy if things get tense.** Playing a game or watching a movie together can provide a chance to cool down and change direction.