

What's your happy? Reflect, share...

November 2016 Newsletter



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Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns — both work and personal. Call for assistance for you, your household members or your adult children under age 26, whether they live at home or not. Call or visit us online today!

The holiday balancing act

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Many people look forward to being with friends and loved ones over the holidays. The visits, meals, decorations and traditions can all be great fun.

At the same time, the holiday season can put a strain on your energy, emotions and wallet. You have certain hopes and needs; other family members and friends have their own too. When these demands are out of sync, it can be stressful.

Yours, mine and ours

The challenge is how to dole out “you” time to others while still keeping your own priorities. If you have a partner or spouse, it can be even trickier since there may be a whole other group of family and friends to consider. How can you make everyone happy — including you?

Organization, flexibility and fairness

Balancing holiday demands takes thought. Here are some ideas to help you plan for the holidays so you can have more fun.

1. Plan ahead. Think about who you’d like to see during the holidays. Then plan out the when and where. If you have a partner, merge your lists to avoid conflict. Or, you could each decide to devote some separate time to your own special people. Whatever works is fine. Just make your plan in advance and share it with family and friends so everyone’s expectations are clear.

2. Loosen up about the calendar. Some families celebrate on dates other than the actual holidays. They may meet for Thanksgiving a week early or a week late. That can make travel much easier and less expensive.

- 3. Create a holiday newsletter or e-card.** Even with the best planning, there’s a chance you won’t get to visit everyone. So get creative: Try writing a “year in review” newsletter. You can send this as a group e-mail and include pictures. You could even self-record a video on your smartphone and send it out as a holiday e-card. For relatives who aren’t e-savvy, you can print and send your greetings by mail.
- 4. Party online.** Thanks to Skype, you can actually “visit” with distant friends and family online. Or use a meet-up app so several friends or relatives from different places can all talk, share a meal or open gifts online at the same time. Take advantage of technology to cut down on the stress and cost of travel while still enjoying connection.
- 5. And as for gifts...** It can get really pricey to buy gifts for one and all. Consider setting a price limit to keep everyone’s budget intact. Or try a family grab bag where each person buys and receives one gift. Also, rather than stress about the perfect gift for each person, remember that gift cards are easy to buy and send through the mail or online. Plus they let people choose exactly what they want.

These are just a few tips to get you thinking. The point is to enjoy the holidays in ways that make you feel happy, healthy and balanced.

Sharing: It's not child's play

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Have you ever had this experience?

Your small child is playing. When another child tries to take your child's toy, a loud, screaming conflict begins. You tell your child that he or she must share the toy.

If this has happened to you, you're not alone. As adults, we place a high value on sharing. We want our children to be well-behaved and to grow up with the social skills they need as adults.

If you think about it, the motto among small kids is "mine!" It may not be reasonable to expect them to share when they're very young because they're not developmentally ready.^{1,2}

How does forced sharing feel?

Imagine you're reading the newspaper and your spouse comes along and grabs it out of your hands because he or she wants to read it. How would you feel?

Now imagine four year-old Tom who's deep in play with a toy. Another child, Mary, comes along and tries to take it. Tom resists. What happens next?

Lessons about sharing

Many parents might say something like "Tom, you've had that toy long enough. Give it to Mary." Or, "Tom, don't be selfish; share with Mary."

But is that fair? Tom learns he must share just because someone else wants a turn – or when an adult tells him to do so. Those aren't very positive lessons.

The fact is preschoolers aren't ready to share. Sharing is a voluntary act of empathy and generosity. Most kids aren't ready to share until they're four or five years old.³ And even then, it can be touch and go.

How can parents help?

So what do you do when your child clutches a toy while another child screams for his or her turn? Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Before a playdate at your house, ask your child if there's a special toy he or she doesn't want to share.** Take that toy and put it away. This gives your child a sense of control over his or her own things.
- 2. Don't force sharing.** If another child wants to play with your child's toy, you might say to your child "It looks like Mary wants to play with that when you're done," or "When you're done playing, tell Mary because she's waiting for her turn."³
- 3. Waiting is just as hard as sharing.** For the child who has to wait for the toy, say something like "Oh! Waiting can be so hard."³ You can also try to get that child engaged in something else in the meantime.

Parenting is hard work. Try to set a good example of sharing. But also remember: Your kids will give and take turns when they're ready.

¹<http://centerforparentingeducation.org>

² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/avital-schreiber-levy/is-sharing-really-caring_b_7198590.html

³<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/4-to-5-year-old-milestones#2>

It's a special time of year for giving

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Many people want to “give back” during the holidays. Some people sign up a year in advance to help those in need over the holidays!

There are plenty of ways to volunteer right now

You don't have to plan that far ahead to volunteer. Many of us can't commit in advance. But there are still countless ways to share. Here are a few ideas:

- **Call a nursing home and ask if you can read to a resident or just visit to chat.** Offer to run a group game like bingo or trivia. If you're crafty, ask if you can make cards or decorations.
- **Help our troops.** Your gift can buy books, phone calls home, internet time and more for our soldiers. You can also help kids of deployed parents. Donate to help them go to camp or get bedtime story DVDs recorded by their deployed parent. For more ideas, visit <http://USOVolunteer.org> or other groups that help our military.
- **Read “Dear Santa” letters written by needy kids.** Choose one or more wishes to fill and send the gifts through Operation Santa. Visit <http://beanelf.org> for more details.
- **Call your local United Way or visit <http://unitedway.org>.** They train volunteers to help domestic abuse victims and other at-risk groups. United Way partners with local agencies to provide the most needed help in your area.
- **Gather a chorale of family and friends.** Then go to a nursing home or hospital to sing holiday or classic tunes. Make sure to call ahead for clearance. If allowed, go room-to-room and take requests. Or lead a sing-a-long in a common area.

- **Donate a new toy for needy kids to Toys for Tots.** To find a drop off, visit <http://toysfortots.org>.
- **Sell your own items on eBay and give some or all of the profits to a charity.**
- **Volunteer at an animal shelter while staff members take time off for the holidays.**
- **Watch your newspaper and grocery bulletin board for volunteer ads.**
- **Invite a friend or coworker who's alone to your holiday dinner.**
- **Contact your local food pantry.** Find the nearest one at <http://feedingamerica.org>. Donate time or food. Learn how to set up a food drive in your neighborhood or at work.
- **Bake and drop off treats at your fire, police and emergency squad stations.** It's an easy way to say “Thank you” and “Happy holidays.”

Share the experience

Ask friends or family to volunteer with you. It's a great way to build meaningful memories. Get kids and teens to join in so they learn about giving as well as getting.

You don't need a lot of time or money to help make someone else's holiday brighter. Sharing at the holidays is about giving of your most precious resource: you!

e-Thoughts — Loving our four- legged friends

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Our e-Thoughts feature provides close-up views on topics and areas of interest from everyday life.

There was a recent news story about sharing that I found very touching. It was about a teenage boy, Sean Martin, whose beloved dog died.¹

Like anyone who loses a pet, Sean was terribly sad. He took his dog's toys, dishes and bed to the local shelter to donate them — as well as to get the memories out of the house. But what he found at the shelter changed his life.

Sharing helps to heal

He found himself drawn to the animals in the shelter. He felt better about his loss when he spent time with the dogs and cats, playing and interacting with them. The shelter pets responded lovingly to him. While their basic needs were met at the shelter, they didn't have much social and play time before Sean came on the scene.

Sean loved being with the pets and saw what a difference he was making. Taking the idea further, Sean helped start a non-profit organization called Kids Adopt a Shelter.²

KAS chapters — now in several places around the country — help kids support shelters and shelter pets. Volunteer teens visit their local shelter and give the animals lots of cuddles and love. They help out around the shelter and reach out to the community when supplies are needed.

The teens even plan an annual “fashion show” adoption party. They dress up the animals in cute and funny costumes and invite the public to the event. It's fun for all and, most importantly, it leads to many adoptions.

The story proved something I've learned before: Young people can teach and show us wonderful things. There are so many ways to share and so many values to it. What an inspiration!

¹pix11.com

²www.kidsadoptashelter.org

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