



Simplify the Holidays

Simplifying the holidays can be as easy as getting your thoughts organized. Why? So you can really enjoy the holidays and celebrate the reason for the season. Let's break it down:

- Before, during and after: Decide how you want to feel when you think about the holiday rush.
 - Organize your time before the holidays,
 - be present and in the moment during the holidays, and
 - after the holidays, make the goodwill last throughout the coming year.
- Guilt-free holidays: Take the word 'should' out.
 - Stop saying I 'should' bake 10 dozen cookies, I 'should' send 200 Christmas cards, or I 'should' put up a big tree.
 - Decide at what level you will celebrate the holidays this year and stick to it no matter what others are doing or what others want.
- Traditions are part of the holidays, but they aren't set in stone.
 - Changing the way you do things isn't the end of the world especially if your life has changed in some way.
 - Some traditions are important and some just don't matter; try to differentiate so you don't feel guilty.
 - Consider starting new traditions with new family members.
- Make a schedule for less stress:
 - When you schedule it, it gets done and the big things aren't left to chance.
 - Put big activities on the calendar so you can enjoy the holidays more: e.g. wrapping gifts, sending cards, baking, decorating the house, etc.
 - Consider shopping early when the stores aren't so busy and take the time for the 'fun' things during December.
- Make a budget and stick to it:
 - Don't let the advertisers or retailers decide how you should celebrate the holidays.
 - Before you wrap gifts or buy gifts, take stock of what you have and make a gift list before you buy so you don't overbuy.
 - Before you bake, take stock of your food staples before you do a big food shopping for flour, sugar, etc.
- Sending cards is a gift of a greeting, not an obligation.
 - Send cards if you want to and if you have more time after the holidays, send a new year's greeting instead!

- Consider going electronic by using SendOutCards.com/vali
 - Put your addresses in the computer and print out labels for a real timesaver.
 - As you write your cards, play your favorite holiday CD or movie and reflect on each name and the memories that go with that name.
- Clutter-free gift-giving: something that isn't necessarily a 'thing'.
- Clutter-free gifts are an experience, a promise of an experience, something that is consumable, something that can be planted, something that is edible, or the gift of 'time'. Some examples:
 - Savings Bonds
 - Gift cards for long-distance minutes, gas, or groceries
 - Gift cards for garden nurseries, restaurants, or local coffee shops
 - Spa and pampering gifts
 - Gym or museum memberships
 - Symphony or Broadway show tickets
 - Babysitting coupons for nieces, nephews or grandchildren
- Holiday parties made simple: Start checklists well in advance.
- Decide who, when, what and how
 - Freeze things ahead of time
 - Ask for help if you need it (caterers or family members)
 - Take stock of what you have before you shop
 - Drinks-make sure there's a wide selection for young and old, drinkers and non-drinkers.
 - Hostess Gifts-encourage clutter-free gifts or have a green theme and have friends bring a canned good for the local food bank or animal food for the local shelter.
- Decorating with ease:
- Containerize your decorations according to the room you place them in. Take pictures of the items when they are displayed and store the pictures in the containers.
 - Pictures make it easier next year, or have your partner or children help decorate using the pictures.
- Leaving room for holiday fun: Impromptu fun and down time is essential
- Make time to go out to eat, drive around to see the neighborhood Christmas lights, ask the neighbors over for drinks or hot chocolate.
 - Don't forget other holiday activities that serve others who may not be having fun at the holidays: volunteering at the food bank, wrapping gifts for charity, or donating to toys for tots.
 - Watch the holiday classics with your kids or your significant other.
 - Go to local Christmas concerts at high schools, colleges or church.
 - Visit the local nurseries or tree farms to enjoy holiday decorations.