



In this Issue:

- *Activities for Christmas*
- *Stress and the simple truth*

Want to keep Christ in Christmas? Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, forgive the guilty, welcome the unwanted, care for the ill, love your enemies, and do unto others as you would have done unto you.”
— [Steve Maraboli, *Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience*](#)

Its easier to feel a little more spiritual with a couple of bucks in your pocket.”
— [Craig Ferguson](#)

“The knowing is easy. It's the doing that gives us trouble.”
— [Vannetta Chapman, *A Simple Amish Christmas*](#)

From the Director-AKA the Curmudgeon

Oh, oh, it's Christmas, so here come the articles and warnings about stress during the holidays!

One corporate Christmas advertisement proclaims the *joy* of the year with the song, “it's the most wonderful time of the year”. But the helping agencies—at least some— say that it's not so wonderful for many, many Americans. What it amounts to is that both are right: people tend to act a little better, give a little more, and live a little brighter during the holidays. On the other hand, homelessness, “un” or underemployment, illness, mental illness, and countless other would-be horsemen of the Apocalypse make the holidays miserable, or unbearable. When families can't give their children the gifts that they think they should, it's not so wonderful either. So it is true: there are those who need help to make Christmas joyful.

But, I have little sympathy for the person stressed about how many pies to make, what to serve at the party, when to wrap pre-

sents, and how much food to prepare for a meal. The stress of making that all happen is self-induced, and really the by-product of having much, at least by way of material goods.

Only 385 shopping days until Christmas, 2014!... What will I get my nephew....he has every toy I can think of!20% off on everything in the store (except what you want, and a few other things)15% off at Macys.....fine crystal for the discerning shopper...He went to Jared's and, last, but not least: the Kardashians reveal their Christmas Card!

Hey, I don't want to appear cynical, but come on...if Christmas is to be judged solely on the content of popular culture, I don't want any part of it.

But this article isn't really about what Christmas “should” be, or how it's to be represented. After all, it seems that's a pretty tall, and highly personal order.

It's about what you think it should be. Sometimes folks find it useful to stop

and think—to contemplate or even meditate on the meaning of such a charged event. Perhaps you're like many Americans who feel a sense of emptiness after it's over with. What's that about, and what can you do about it? Do you find yourself stressing over the events of Christmas at your house? Could this self induced stress be a substitute for missing a deeper meaning of the season? Activity can be compensation for unexpressed feelings. Is it a learned response as to how one should behave during the season? Are you compensating for Christmas' past? Is Christmas what you want it to be for you and your family?

By the way, if you are happy with your Christmas experience, good for you! Nothing wrong with that!

But, About 45 percent of Americans would prefer to skip Christmas altogether this December, according to a recent survey conducted by Think Finance, a loan provider.

“Financial hardships have rendered the simple joy of gift giving a nuisance for many.” cites the author of the survey.

For these folks, Christmas must have a lot to do with presents and the like. That's too

true for many of us. Maybe that's why so many feel empty afterwards. If the boxes are empty, so are we. Much is said about the joy of giving, and I'll admit it's a lot of fun. But are we not a mirror image of that which we give away? What would we expect of people except that they perceive us to value that which we present. If, for example, the greatest gift you can give your child is time spent in church and contemplative study, you'll get one response. If your greatest gift is the Iphone 5000, well, that's a different set of perceptions. I'm not saying that there's anything right or wrong with either example. What I am saying is that we, individually and collectively, make our Christmas what it is, at least for the most part.

OK, here comes the war story from the old fart: When I was a boy our expectations were for "a" Christmas present—not Presents. One year I got a gun and holster set. One year I got some school clothes. I was so happy that I had new clothes to wear. It did not occur to me that we did not have enough. Sure, it was cold in the house in the winter (largely because it was an old, uninsulated farm house). We could not use the bedrooms upstairs because it was so cold that sometimes water would freeze on a dresser. We did not have an indoor bathroom, but after I was about 6 or so we had a 9 inch television. My father was nowhere to be found, and my mother had her problems, let's say. Blizzards were a particularly fun time for us kids because the snow apparently helped insulate the house, and there was always enough fire wood and fuel oil at those times. Someone must have prepared ahead. Please understand—this is not nostalgia for a "better, simpler time". The lingering stench from the drama of the household is nothing to long for. We were not happy people. Period



And Panic was not an option.

Somewhere I decided to try to be happy, and I've done reasonably well, despite some predictable peaks and valleys. There is so much I wish I could do better, and believe me, I am never far from the realization that my shortcomings are legion.

But, I've got two children, four beautiful grandchildren, a job I really love, a staff to be envied for, a home that is warm, and the memories of some wonderful events in my life.

So, I wish for you.....

I do not wish you joy, without the sorrowed dark
Nor tides that never turn against your bark;
I wish you joy....goods,.....gold enough to help some needy one
And God's sweet peace, when every day is done.
—Father Joseph Martin

Family Support Group



Merry  *Christmas*

Parent to Parent Network

Invites you and your family to join us for a Holiday Open House:

Come join the fun!

There will be Holiday Crafts for the kids to make and snacks to enjoy!

When: Monday, December 16, 2013

Where: 201 Miller Avenue.

Time: 4:00-6:00 pm.

Family members must be present in order to receive any holiday goodies.

Please Call by Dec. 12th to register:

1-877-226-8819 or 402-379-2268

Happy Holidays



Stress and the Holidays or “The Egnog and I”

Tips for parents on managing holiday stress

A 2008 holiday stress poll by the APA showed that more than eight out of 10 Americans anticipate stress during the holiday season. Money, in particular, can be a cause of stress, as parents feel demands to purchase gifts, decorations and other items tied to holiday celebrations. In the 2008 holiday stress poll, households with children were more likely to report anticipating stress during the holidays than those without, and one-third expected stress due to pressure to buy gifts or because of too many things to do. Additionally, [APA's 2011 Stress in America](#) survey found that 75 percent of Americans report money as a significant source of stress.

Heightened stress during the holidays can lead to unhealthy stress management behaviors, such as overeating and drinking to excess. People tend to reduce their stress in ways they have

learned over the course of time because they turn to what they know.

You may take comfort in unhealthy stress management techniques just because they're familiar, even though they're not good for your health. But, there are other behaviors you can learn to further relieve stress and its effects that may be both healthier for you and longer lasting.

- **Set expectations** – Talk to your kids about expectations for gifts and holiday activities. Be open with them if money is an issue. Depending on a child's age, parents can use this as an opportunity to teach their kids about the value of money and responsible spending. And be realistic. Take small concrete steps to deal with holiday tasks instead of overwhelming yourself with goals that are too far reaching for a busy time.
- **Keep things in perspective** – Try to consider stressful situations in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing events out of proportion and teach your kids how to keep things in perspective, including what type and the number of gifts they receive.
- **Make connections** – Good relationships with family and friends are important. So, view the holidays as a time to reconnect with people. Additionally, accepting help and support from those who care about you can help alleviate stress. Even volunteering at a local charity with your kids is

a good way to connect with others, assist someone in need and teach your kids about the value of helping others.

- **Take care of yourself** – Pay attention to your own needs and feelings during the holiday season. Engage in activities that you and your family enjoy and find relaxing. Taking care of yourself helps keep your mind and body healthy and primed to deal with stressful situations. Consider cutting back television viewing for kids and instead, get the family out together for a winter walk. It promotes activity and takes kids away from sedentary time and possible influence from advertisements.

Schmaltzy Christmas specials and Hallmark cards paint a picture most "real" families can't live up to during the holidays.

Kids often get a case of the "I wants" that can't be cured, even if they get the gifts they whined for — and then they whine some more. Grandparents sometimes turn into Bigfoot, stomping over the routines of the nuclear family. Overburdened couples, with too little time and too many demands, may be more likely to utter "Bah! Humbug," than hum "fa la la la la la la la la."

College students — not quite independent adults, not quite dependent children — are often at loose ends. So what?



(Continued from Page 4)

The first step is "realizing that the holidays don't have to be a Hallmark commercial. Accept the holidays for the good and the bad that happens," he says.

"As annoying as any relative may be, it is important to remember that we never know who will not be sitting at the table next year. So appreciate your family and accept the good with the bad," adds Duffy.

"There will be burnt turkeys and blackouts, weather-related delays and unbearable traffic," says Duffy. "But we do these things because, as humans, we have a strong motivation to belong to a group, to be needed and loved."

Knowing that you can't meet every expectation — and shouldn't — is vital, says Robin Bilazarian, a licensed clinical social worker who provides counseling for Cooper University Hospital employees in New Jersey.

"It is fun to create some traditions, such as reading a special book, or having a special dinner, but remember, everyone can help with that and even be in charge of an event," says Bilazarian.

Risa D. Swell, director of Cooper Hospital's employee assistance program, likes holding a family meeting before the holidays to air things out. The meeting "lets everyone have a say as what's most important to them," she says.

Duffy says it is hard to prescribe specific approaches to some holiday problems because each family's communication style differs.

"Some families are open and honest so communicating issues, like staying at a hotel, are easy to accomplish. For other families, such conversations are impossible," he says.

Despite that caveat, here are some tips from Duffy, Bilazarian and Swell that may help bring back the "fa la la."

(Continued on Page 6)



- 1. Take the holidays with a grain of humor.** "Find the funny in your crazy in-laws, as laughter is a great way to diffuse tension and cope with stress," says Duffy.
- 2. Eat well.** "Proper nutrition helps with thinking straight and managing stress, especially at a time when candy is everywhere and you have to often eat on the run."
- 3. Help others.** "Studies show that helping others helps improves well-being. Taking some time to give to those in need can put perspective on one's own situation and can be the best gift of all," Duffy says.
- 4. Be patient.** "Every family has an Archie Bunker who will say things you may find infuriating," says Duffy. "Understand what makes family special is that you may agree to disagree but every year you still get together because there are more important things than politics or religion, neither of which, by the way, should be discussed during the holidays."
- 5. Communication is key.** "The No. 1 problem in couples counseling is not money, children or in-law problems. It is expecting the other to mind-read what you want," says Bilazarian. "This pops up during the holidays, but is multiplied over and over by in-laws on both sides, greedy children, holiday parties and the couple themselves. The solution is candid discussion on expectations and good boundaries to not overextend."
- 6. Insist children go to bed at reasonable times.** "That way you and your spouse get some quality time to sip eggnog while admiring the holiday decorations," says Bilazarian. Inexpensive couples-only time should continue over the holidays, despite competing time demands.
- 7. A discussion about a dollar amounts can happen between adults in MOST families.** "Get brave and discuss with the others if finances have been difficult this year," says Bilazarian. "You can propose homemade gifts, too. If others still see it differently, get realistic about what you can afford and stick to it. Remember, a 'gift of time' also counts. The holidays are a time of celebration, not desperation."
- 8. Have an expectations talk BEFORE the holidays.** "This is highly recommended," says Bilazarian. Discussion topics include who is coming and how long they are staying at your house. Are they willing to give you a gift of an evening of baby-sitting so you and your spouse get needed time alone? Who is cooking what? How many meals are you expected to host and what will happen about other meals? What type of help can you expect from others?"
- 9. Mentally review the last family holiday and consider what worked, what didn't and what has changed since.** Then adjust, says Bilazarian. "If circumstances have changed — a new baby in what was the guest room, more relatives coming than your household fits, be honest about these and encourage people to sleep elsewhere, even if you split the costs of a hotel. When they leave at 8 p.m. to go to their hotel, you will notice an immediate reduction in tension and be grateful to yourself for doing this."
- 10. Plan for de-stressing.** "Accept that the holidays are stressful in both extra responsibilities and intensity with people," Bilazarian adds. "Thus, have stress management strategies available such as going for a walk, listening to music, exercise, yoga, acupressure, a deep cleansing breath, counting to push your brain into the less emotional left side."
- 11. If your kids are post-Santa age, talk to them about gifts and a budget.** "It's never too early for them to learn how to manage money," says Swell. "You can discuss a budget and let them be a part of the prioritizing. My son wanted an iPhone and that was his big present, but my daughter decided she would rather have several outfits than just an iPhone and both were happy."
- 12. Include grandparents, without letting them dominate.** "Let them know how great their gravy is, ask them to make it for you or carving the turkey is also great for a grandparent. They want to still feel important and needed," adds Swell.

10 Tips for Managing Family Stress at Holidays

Posted by [Dr. Elaine Ducharme](#)

Holiday cheer...or is it holiday fear? While many of us are eagerly awaiting the arrival of family to help celebrate the holiday season, many are dreading the same event.

I have heard patients and friends talk about ways to avoid being with certain relatives who they know will be rude, obnoxious, drunk, or all of the above. This can get to be a bit tricky with in-laws and step families. While we can't choose our relatives, we can choose how and when we spend time with them and how we respond to their behaviors.

Here are **10 quick tips** to survive "*relative stress*".

1. Avoid getting overwhelmed by feeling the need to visit with everyone on the same day. Setting up smaller get togethers during the holidays can help you enjoy longer periods of time with those you enjoy. And you'll have time for shorter events such as getting together for a cocktail or coffee with relatives with whom you are less comfortable.

2. Establish new traditions. Decide what is best for you and your immediate family. Christmas Eve at one parent's home and Christmas Day at another's can work well and avoids the pitfalls of everyone being exhausted and overwhelmed on a single day.

3. Put your kid's needs first after a divorce. Don't make your kid's responsible for making your holiday special. Help them figure out a way to enjoy time with each parent and let them know that you will be fine. If the other parent is far away and the child can't spend Christmas Eve with one parent and Christmas Day with the other, one option is using technology to make the "visits." If both parents have computers with web cameras, children and parent can talk and see other using a program such as Skype and share the holiday time.

4. Lay down your sword. I have been pleasantly surprised recently by a number of divorced parents getting together and sharing a holiday meal. Perhaps this is what the holiday is really about. A cautionary note is to be careful young kids don't think you are getting back together. And certainly don't put yourself in an abusive situation. That doesn't help anyone.

5. Be assertive. Don't be afraid to leave a gathering or put your kids down for a nap if they are starting to get tired. It is OK to take charge of your family's needs.

6. Plan time for activities you think everyone will enjoy. Whether it's decorating cookies or playing Yahtzee, specific activities can help give you some control over how the day goes. My adult kids often go to the movies together on Christmas afternoon. I remember long games of Monopoly with cousins over the holidays. Remember that it's OK if not everyone wants to participate.

7. Be flexible and let go of some control. Some of the best memories are made when things are less than perfect. How many of us have forgotten to serve a dish? I recall numerous Jell-O molds left in the fridge and discovered at the end of the meal.

8. Accept help. Working together in the kitchen, cooking or cleaning up, provides good opportunities for communication. Really listening to people may help you feel more comfortable with family members. Letting others help with serving, carving and cooking also lets them feel good while decreasing your responsibilities.

9. Look for the good. So often we focus on annoying behaviors. If we really try hard, we can often find something good about most people.

10. Volunteer. If being with relatives proves to be just too stressful, consider volunteering at a homeless shelter, soup kitchen, nursing home or other local group that can use the help and will appreciate it. Volunteering is guaranteed to make just about everyone feel good

The Little Match Girl

A translation of Hans Christian Andersen's "Den lille Pige med Svovlstikkerne" by [Jean Hersholt](#).

It was so terribly cold. Snow was falling, and it was almost dark. Evening came on, the last evening of the year. In the cold and gloom a poor little girl, bareheaded and barefoot, was walking through the streets. Of course when she had left her house she'd had slippers on, but what good had they been? They were very big slippers, way too big for her, for they belonged to her mother. The little girl had lost them running across the road, where two carriages had rattled by terribly fast. One slipper she'd not been able to find again, and a boy had run off with the other, saying he could use it very well as a cradle some day when he had children of his own. And so the little girl walked on her naked feet, which were quite red and blue with the cold. In an old apron she carried several packages of matches, and she held a box of them in her hand. No one had bought any from her all day long, and no one had given her a cent.

Shivering with cold and hunger, she crept along, a picture of misery, poor little girl! The snowflakes fell on her long fair hair, which hung in pretty curls over her neck. In all the windows lights were shining, and there was a wonderful smell of roast goose, for it was New Year's eve. Yes, she thought of that!

In a corner formed by two houses, one of which projected farther out into the street than the other, she sat down and drew up her little feet under her. She was getting colder and colder, but did not dare to go home, for she had sold no matches, nor earned a single cent, and her father would surely beat her. Besides, it was cold at home, for they had nothing over them but a roof through which the wind whistled even though the biggest cracks had been stuffed with straw and rags.

Her hands were almost dead with cold. Oh, how much one little match might warm her! If she could only take one from the box and rub it against the wall and warm her hands. She drew one out. *R-r-ratch!* How it sputtered and burned! It made a warm, bright flame, like a little candle, as she held her hands over it; but it gave a strange light! It really seemed to the little girl as if she were sitting before a great iron stove with shining brass knobs and a brass cover. How wonderfully the fire burned! How comfortable it was! The youngster stretched out her feet to warm them too; then the little flame went out, the stove vanished, and she had only the remains of the burnt match in her hand.

She struck another match against the wall. It burned brightly, and when the light fell upon the wall it became transparent like a thin veil, and she could see through it into a room. On the table a snow-white cloth was spread, and on it stood a shining dinner service. The roast goose steamed gloriously, stuffed with apples and prunes. And what was still better, the goose jumped down from the dish and waddled along the floor with a knife and fork in its breast, right over to the little girl. Then the match went out, and she could see only the thick, cold wall. She lighted another match. Then she was sitting under the most beautiful Christmas tree. It was much larger and much more beautiful than the one she had seen last Christmas through the glass door at the rich merchant's home. Thousands of candles burned on the green branches, and colored pictures like those in the print shops looked down at her. The little girl reached both her hands toward them. Then the match went out. But the Christmas lights mounted higher. She saw them now as bright stars in the sky. One of them fell down, forming a long line of fire.

"Now someone is dying," thought the little girl, for her old grandmother, the only person who had loved her, and who was now dead, had told her that when a star fell down a soul went up to God. She rubbed another match against the wall. It became bright again, and in the glow the old grandmother stood clear and shining, kind and lovely.

Edgar Albert Guest (1891-195) was born in England, but came to the United States with his family when he was ten. He became a reporter for the Detroit Free Press, where his first poem was published in 1898. This oft-quoted poem remarks on the change for the better that the Christmas season brings out (or should bring out) in folks.

At Christmas by Edgar Albert Guest

A man is at his finest towards the finish of the year;
He is almost what he should be when the Christmas season is here;
Then he's thinking more of others than he's thought the months before,
And the laughter of his children is a joy worth toiling for.
He is less a selfish creature than at any other time;
When the Christmas spirit rules him he comes close to the sublime.
When it's Christmas man is bigger and is better in his part;
He is keener for the service that is prompted by the heart.
All the petty thoughts and narrow seem to vanish for awhile
And the true reward he's seeking is the glory of a smile.
Then for others he is toiling and somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas he is almost what God wanted him to be.
If I had to paint a picture of a man I think I'd wait
Till he'd fought his selfish battles and had put aside his hate.
I'd not catch him at his labors when his thoughts are all of self,
On the long days and the dreary when he's striving for himself.
I'd not take him when he's sneering, when he's scornful or depressed,
But I'd look for him at Christmas when he's shining at his best.
Man is ever in a struggle and he's oft misunderstood;
There are days the worst that's in him is the master of the good,
But at Christmas kindness rules him and he puts himself aside
And his petty hates are vanquished and his heart is opened wide.
Oh, I don't know how to say it, but somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas man is almost what God sent him here to be.

| | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
|  |  | Parent to Parent Network |
|  |  | <h1>Events</h1> |

Federation Retreat

Advocates and the E.D. attended the second annual Nebraska Federation of Families retreat for family organizations. The event was held at Platte River State Park near Louisville, NE. Guest speakers were noted experts in the field of family peer support.

Committee Memberships

Executive Director Robert Gereaux served as Chairman of the Federations financial reports committee, whose purpose was to develop a financial expenditures reporting document to bring about uniformity of reporting such data to the Federation. Gereaux also has served on a number of Federation committees. Tawna Lichty continues to serve on the committee developing the Children’s Mental Health Week activities for 2014.

Halloween Party

Our Halloween party held at Poppy’s Pumpkin Patch went off with a bang! We had a great turnout-20 kids and 16 adults. The windy, cold weather didn’t stop several of the kids (and adults!) to arrive festively in their Halloween costumes. Everyone enjoyed hot cocoa and goodies in the barn and got the chance to explore Poppy’s farm either by foot or via train ride! The pumpkin patch had a variety of pumpkins for the taking for each of the children that attended!

System of Care Kick-Off

10 Family members and 3 staff travelled to Lincoln to participate in the initial function as Nebraska initiates its Federal Grant funded process to assist the State to Research and Plan a behavioral health System of Care. An intense, inclusive process will follow, and the State has committed to gathering input from it’s citizens including family members of children with behavioral health challenges. Anyone who wants can provide input in ways discussed throughout this newsletter, or by simply writing the department. Robert Gereaux, Executive Director is Co-Chairman of the “Services and Supports” committee, one of twelve committees formed to be the primary focus where much of the work of gathering and communicating commentary, ideas, and structure to DHHS.



Open Your Heart And Home To A Teen Today...Become A Foster Parent!

Contact Jennifer Buss
888-537-9727
Jennifer.buss@nebraska.gov

Make a difference!

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services 

2014

Parent to Parent Network

Parent to Parent Network
201 Miller Avenue
Norfolk, NE 68701

Board of Directors:

President : Linnea Gettman,
Big Brothers & Big Sisters

Vice President: Alicia Dorcey,
Faith Regional Psych. Services

Treasurer: Dan Fuerhoff, Cer-
tified Public Accountant

Secretary: Cathie Anderson,
Oakland Craig Public Schools

Candace Allen, United Way

Bev Ferguson, Liberty Centre

Mark Claussen, School Psy-
chologist Norfolk Public
Schools

Joel Carlson, Attorney



Parent to Parent Network is affiliated with the
Nebraska Federation of Families for Chil-
dren's Mental Health

Members of:

National Alliance for Mentally Ill (NAMI)

National Federation of Families for Children's
Mental Health

Parent to Parent Network is a private, non-profit, commu-
nity based organization devoted to strengthening families
in Nebraska. Organized in 1998, the program has grown
substantially through the years, including outreach to sev-
eral communities in Northeast Nebraska.

We hire people who are or have been primary care-givers
for children with behavioral health, emotional, or school
issues. Our Advocates are trained to help, but their
strength lies in having "been there", and having found
ways to navigate the systems affecting their child.

We charge no fees for our services. We're members of the
Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental
Health and the National Federation with the same name.

Services are provided confidentially. You determine what
services you want. We may make suggestions, but you
have the final say!

Advocacy on behalf of the families we serve is an integral
part of the services we provide. We look upon those to
whom we advocate as being partners rather than oppo-
nents. We prefer what we call collaborative advocacy. We
know that our families are best served when we make and
strengthen partnerships with other helping organizations.
Our advocacy is done with regard for one overriding princi-
ple: ***that the family voice be heard.***

OUR WEB ADDRESS IS:
WWW.PARENT-PARENT.ORG

Staff:

Robert Gereaux, Executive Director

Tawna Lichty, Family Services Coordinator

JoAnn Pieper, Office Manager

Cliff Hogancamp, Information Systems Specialist

Kimberly Dye, Family Advocate

Amanda Dunbar, Family Advocate

Vacant, Family Advocate

Maribel Bernal, Office Assistant