



## **The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good: Advice for More Satisfying Holidays**

By, Lisa Greenberg, PhD

Many people, and especially many women, begin to feel anxious as the holiday season approaches. They are flooded with images of how each holiday is supposed to be: beautifully decorated house, elaborate and delicious meals, perfectly behaved children, well-chosen gifts, and so forth. These images are often based in childhood memories, and much of the anxiety around holiday preparations is rooted in a powerful desire to either recreate or repair our childhood experiences. Endless messages from friends, family, and the media play their part as well, leaving women feeling a powerful need to create "perfect" holidays, and deeply anxious at the thought of being unable to create this perfection. Below are five tips to help you manage this anxiety, and to bring more enjoyment to your holidays.

1. Manage your expectations. Everything will not turn out as you wish. The roast will burn, the most important gift won't be delivered in time, and someone will spill red wine on your best tablecloth. None of these will feel good, but understanding that you cannot control every detail will help you to keep mishaps from ruining the day.
2. Share the responsibility for creating a lovely holiday. Accept offers of help. Remember to include kids of all ages in the preparations. Toddlers can attach stickers to gifts, and teens can bake and wrap. Expecting one person to do it all leaves that person overwhelmed and resentful.
3. Know your crowd. If you're entertaining young children or others who won't be able to sit for long stretches, consider a buffet rather than a five course sit down dinner. If there is someone attending whom you know is likely to be critical or unpleasant, strive to be polite, while allowing yourself to remember that you probably won't succeed in pleasing him or her.
4. Know your limits. Is baking yet another batch of cookies going to be a pleasure for you and a delight to your guests, or will it so exhaust you that it will be hard to be pleasant, much less to actually enjoy yourself?
5. Know what you want to achieve, which is most likely an experience of joy in being together for yourself, your family, and your guests. This is about the emotional experience, not about creating a picture perfect scene. I like to remember that my husband's most frequently recalled childhood holiday is of the Thanksgiving when the cat ate half the raw, defrosted turkey, and dinner became hastily purchased barbecued chicken - no one's idea of picture perfect, but happily remembered decades later.

Above all, holidays are a time to remember that, "The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good." Aim for "good" over "perfect," and strive to bring joy to others, and to yourself.

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