

## Finding Inner Peace

The hustle and bustle of the holidays is here! Some people thrive on the extra hubbub and can't wait to be a part of the goings-on of the season. On the other hand, some individuals don't enjoy the season at all. To them, all of that bustle just creates a dizzying array of demands.

Whether we enjoy the added demands or not, a lot of those stresses are based upon expectations we place upon ourselves and those perceived expectations we feel others have of us. It's no wonder it's often difficult to experience true 'peace' – a term that is a wish for all this time of year.

So, what does peace look like? Think of the "P" as a reminder to spend time with the "people" who mean the most to you. That may include close family and a few special friends. When was the last time you called or wrote a card to your grandparents or a distant family member? A personal handwritten note represents a lot of thought and care for those loved ones. Let's hope we are able to get back to family traditions with gatherings this season.

Did you know the breath cycle actually begins with an "exhale" (for "E")? The longer the exhale, the deeper the inhale will be. Deep breathing will often aid in relaxation and reducing stress. So if things begin to get tense at your perfect family gathering, practice your deep breathing – especially before you choose to respond.

Consider "anticipation" for the letter "A". There is usually a lot of anticipation associated with the holidays. Research has shown that the part of the brain responsible for feeling pleasure is activated when we think about doing something we enjoy or anticipate it. Daydreaming about favorite things is actually good for you. Remember when you were young you probably looked forward to Christmas morning with great anticipation. Now that you are older, find new ways to look forward to the holidays.

Make a list and "check-off" ("C") items as you finish them. Completing items on a list (be it a written list or one put in your handheld device) brings success. It often reduces the overwhelming feelings that go along with many tasks to be done. Choose one system for tracking and stick with it.

Let go of your "expectations" -- the final "E". The passage of time brings change. Families evolve, babies are born, people pass. Accepting the reality that time changes holiday traditions can help you overcome feelings of stress. Begin to look for exciting new things for the season instead of focusing on days past. Start new traditions while sharing your own treasured holiday memories. It's okay to miss what was, but do not let your focus on the past steal the joy of the present.

Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Do some preparation to prevent the stress that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, before they seem to take over. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

For more information and guidance on managing holiday stress, contact a Southwind District Extension Office.

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