


Family Living Focus
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Balancing Work and Holidays
It's that time of year again. You know, when we add more things to our to do list and vow to be more in control this year than in the past. Then there's the reminders in the magazines, on the television commercials, and the merry jingle in the air. We're somehow supposed to be cheery and have everything in "perfect" order for our family and friends. Visions of Norman Rockwell or Currier and Ives come to mind. However, in the real world, there are already bustling, over-crowded schedules. How in the world can one more thing be added, let alone all the things big and little that are expected during the holiday season?

While there is no easy recipe for a fool-proof season of merriment, following are some tips that might be helpful for families who are juggling work and holiday preparation.

Reminiscence — What are your fondest memories of past holidays? (Not necessarily your childhood memories because you probably didn't have much responsibility for making any of it happen. If we focus on our childhood, we may easily over extend ourselves.) If you do this as a family, you'll get a pretty good idea of what's important to the kids and other adults with whom you share the holiday season. Sometimes it's not what we're expending our energies on that makes the holiday season memorable. For children, usually what they want is time with their family. Actually, if asked, I bet that's what most adults really want as well.

Make a list — Keep in mind what is most memorable. Make a

list of everything that has to get done as well as the things members of the family want to get done. Once that list is made, prioritize in first, second, and third categories. With that accomplished, decide who is going to do which task. Remember, preparing for the holidays doesn't need to fall on just one person's shoulders. If tasks are shared equally according to abilities and interests, there's more time for everyone to enjoy the festivities.

Plan ahead — Some people like to prepare for Christmas all year long, making crafts or gifts each month so they're ready when the season hits. Most of us probably aren't that organized. If you're like me, I need to be in the mood, and that usually doesn't hit until about now. Which means that I have a lot to get done. However, even now planning can happen. From your list of what needs to be accomplished and put it on the calendar, taking into consideration all the other activities that are happening. If tasks are spread out over time, it's not so cumbersome.

Realistic expectations — We often compare our families, home, and presents to what's on the cards, commercials, or in the songs. When we don't measure up, there can be a feeling of disappointment. Being realistic with yourself and your family is important. Just because it's the holidays doesn't mean the children are going to be perfect. Nor does it mean you'll suddenly be a gourmet cook or interior decorator. Focus on what's real for your family during the rest of the year and build on those strengths.

Cookie exchange — One of my favorite childhood memories is making cut-out cookies with my mother, her best friend, and neighbor. While they exchanged labors and made the task enjoyable, that exchange of labor can take place via a cookie exchange. If you've not been part of a cookie exchange in the past, think about organizing one this year yourself. For each person that comes, they bring a dozen cookies for all the other guests. So, if thirteen people are invited, each person brings thirteen dozen cookies. If the host has organized it so everyone volunteers to bake a different kind of cookie, everyone goes home with an assortment of thirteen dozen cookies. While making a batch that size does take some time, it saves time in the long run. Plus, the fun is getting together with friends and exchanging recipes. Our family still reserves one night to make cut-out cookies just because it's "tradition."

Shop by catalog — There are a variety of mail-order catalogues available that allow you to let your fingers do the walking and saves time and energy. Many companies will ship the wrapped gift directly to your loved one if they live at a distance. Not fighting the traffic and crowds in the mall can save time, energy and nerves!

Exchange childcare — While you may still have a need to get out and shop at the mall, you may not want to have children in tow. How about exchanging child care with a friend. Children often have so much fun having a friend over, that even the parent who is providing the care can get some tasks accomplished because the children will be entertaining each other.

Keep a schedule — One of

the most important ingredients for children is keeping a schedule. That includes children of all ages! Try to maintain a normal bedtime if at all possible and despite chaos, have some quiet family time to read or play games. It's good for children as well as adults.

Eat healthy — With the variety of parties and crazy agendas during the holidays, we often just grab something to eat. Then, we feel sluggish and guilty for not eating well. Maintaining a healthy diet during a busy schedule isn't difficult if you have prepared vegetables in the refrigerator and freeze meals that can be microwaved or put in the oven when you get home from work. Plus, if you've eaten a good meal, you're less apt to snack on junk food and then have to worry about those extra pounds to get off after the holidays.

"Whisper hour" — I came across this great idea and am going to try it myself. Sometimes we get so busy and excited about what's happening that our voices continue to rise without us even knowing it. Everyday set aside a "whisper hour" when everyone

has to whisper. Even if things are going smoothly, just whisper for that hour. Whispering creates a serene effect and helps calm the nerves.

Time off — If possible, try to take some time off of work when everyone else is in school or at work. Use that time to spend with a friend, shop without worrying about other's schedules, or do a task you really want and need to do alone. OR, spend the whole day pampering yourself so you're refreshed when the gang all comes in the door at the end of the day, ready for the next event!

Focus on Family — I did not leave this for the end because it's the least important, but rather, because it's the most important. You're more apt to remember the last thing you read. No matter what else does or doesn't get done during this holiday season, or how much time you spend doing charity in the community or at church, be sure you have family time as a focus for your agenda. Let this be a holiday you will all want to remember.

Season's Greetings to each of you!

Thanksgiving Tidbits

• Truly a native bird, the turkey lived in the Americas some ten million years ago.

• Ben Franklin lobbied for the turkey as the official bird of the United States.


• The name "cranberry" most likely comes from the "crane," a bird who fed on this fruit.

• Cranberries may not have been on the first Thanksgiving menu but were given by Native Ameri-

cans to the Pilgrims as gifts.

• An everyday food in the Pilgrims' diet, pumpkin appeared on the first Thanksgiving menu as a side dish, boiled and unsweetened.

• The residents of Colchester, Conn. voted to delay their Thanksgiving celebration in 1705 until molasses arrived for pumpkin pie. The ship carrying the molasses was a week late due to a snowstorm.



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