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This month's technique

Talking Turkey *Your Holiday Survival Guide*

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Besides referring to the holiday season as a time of joy and good cheer, this period is also referred to as the **Terrible Toos**: Too much expectation, too many visitors and family members, and too many obligations. Here is an easy to remember acronym to help you manage the stress of the season and to keep your holiday gathering from turning into a **TURKEY**.

Take things in stride. Realize that the gathering might be stressful for everyone on some level and tempers might be simmering. The kids may be over-excited and tired; older relatives may be fatigued from the traveling. The host family may be exhausted because of the preparation and cooking. "Be Teflon, Not Velcro" is a great mantra for the season.

Understand that the holidays will not magically repair fractured relationships nor resolve long-standing issues. Just because everyone in the holiday movies appears to live happily ever after, does not mean that your family issues will be resolved by the end of the meal. Also the holiday gathering is not the best time to bring a long-standing issue up for resolution. It's best to choose another time where you can discuss the issue in privacy without everyone and their brother getting involved.

Remember to take care of yourself in terms of maintaining exercise, proper nutrition and sleep. When we are stressed we tend to let go of healthy habits—we don't sleep well, we overeat or over-drink and over spend. This year, set yourself up for success by creating a plan for healthy eating and

self-care, particularly if you have any medical or psychological difficulties. Ignoring your health needs over the holidays will only make you feel worse in the long run.

Keep things in perspective and be kind to yourself. If you are feeling stressed out by the hours or days of being held captive by relatives, periodically remove yourself for short respites—take a walk, take some deep breaths—do what you need to regain a sense of peace and calm. This step is also important if you are recovering from the death or absence of a loved one. The holidays trigger memories of earlier times and can intensify feelings of loneliness and sadness. Talk with others about your feelings or seek out services from a mental health professional if you are having difficulty coping with your loss.

Enjoy the experience in the here and now rather than focusing on the past or on what the gathering "should" be. Focus on what you want to get out of the experience and make choices that will make the time spent with family positive.

Say **"Yes" to the things you want to participate in and "No" to those that will overextend your emotions, finances or time.** Set boundaries for yourself. Be clear to yourself and others about your limits. Armed with these strategies you will be certain to fly through the holidays with less stress and tension and, who knows, you may actually find yourself looking forward to the next family gathering!



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