



# Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**  
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## *Not the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*

It's December, once again. Time for the mad rush, traffic and stress to escalate. Time to look at how perfect everything looks in the magazines and on TV and feel inadequate. Time to feel poor because you can't afford to buy everything your kids want. Time to feel exhausted because you can't seem to get everything done: the decorating, the cooking, the gift buying, the gift wrapping, the parties, the family obligations.

Wait a minute! Isn't this supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the year?!" What has happened here? Where is all the joy and happiness? Why is everyone irritated and stressed?

If I have pegged you in the previous two paragraphs, I'm sorry to tell you that you have been sucked in. You, like so many of us, bought in to the concept that this season should be easy to navigate. So, year after year you keep trying, thinking it must be you. You're the only one who can't seem to manage the holidays without feeling overwhelmed. Wrong!

A very few years ago, I decided to get off the hamster wheel that has become the holidays. I had tried to "do it all" long enough. I wanted to actually enjoy this time of year (what a concept!).

I am still living by my decisions today. Here is how my holidays are different these days:

**Decorating** - I love the way it looks, but hate doing it. And, frankly, it's not my gift. It is, however, the gift of a friend of mine. So, now she decorates, and I am her assistant. We get to visit and catch up, and I give her some cash for her time. But, I know she'd do it for free just because she loves it. Since she has been handling the decorating, I have learned that not every square inch of the house needs to be decorated. I've scaled back considerably, and put out only the things I really love. This saves a ton of time, and since there is less to look at, I can actually see everything!

**Cooking** - Another thing I don't love to do. Oh, I don't mind making a few dishes, but I am tired of the days before a holiday being spent in the kitchen. I have learned to make a lot of the same dish and bring it wherever I go. I have also learned to make some things in advance and freeze them. And I have learned that buying some dishes is perfectly acceptable. I want the purpose of the holidays to be visiting and connecting with people I love, not about whether or not everything we are eating is homemade.

**Gifts** - I've scaled back considerably here. My shopping list is much shorter than it used to be. I was buying presents for everyone! I also approach shopping differently. When I see something good, I give it to as many people on my list as is appropriate. Thankfully, both sides of the family have gone to a "white elephant" concept: all the adults each bring one good gift, put them all in a pile and draw numbers. Half the fun is stealing from each other, and seeing what you will end up with. It's so much easier than buying something for every single person (and cheaper, you end up with nicer things, and you have fewer things to find a new home for!).

**Time** - there's only so much of it, and I want to spend it wisely. I love to sing, so I make the time to go to area nursing homes with my singing group. Church is very important to me, so that is always a big part of the holidays for me. I also have people I want to spend some time with! If all the gifts get thrown into bags instead of being wrapped, that's just fine with me. The end result will be the same - a person gets a gift, and I saved a lot of time for things I'd rather be doing.

There you have it: my tricks for actually enjoying the holidays. I hope some of this has spoken to you, and that you are challenged to find your own ways to make this "the most wonderful time of the year!" See you next year!