

Holiday travel — happiness or stress?

Advice Line

by Dr. Betty Phillips



My philosophy is: why settle for less than happiness? Peace on earth and peace in your heart! We all want to find this wonderful place every day and especially during the holidays. But the stress monster hates holidays! So here are some ideas for you to defeat the stress monster's nefarious plans to spoil your holiday.

Let's start with happiness. Your primary goal for yourself and your family during any holiday will be peace and joy, not just surviving travel and family conflicts. Toward this end, take a moment to develop a short happiness meditation to use for holiday planning and at other times in your life. Just arrange a picture in your mind of people or things you love, add a few words as a mantra and set it to uplifting or cheerful mind music. Your mantra could be "love" or "peace" or whatever will help you recall your special meditation.

Next make a plan for family fun and involve each person in planning his or her travel enjoyment kit. You can't just expect entertainment to find you. Each person should get together a knapsack of things they will enjoy during the travel and holiday activities. You'll probably have to help the children put together their own kits and not overload with electronic gadgets.

Your travel kit should not include work activities. If you absolutely have to connect with work during your holiday time, schedule a time and place for the absolute minimum number of work tasks and do not allow continuing interruptions.

If your holiday travel plan includes children, be sure to develop an incentive behavior plan with input from the children. Too often family travel finds children squabbling, whining and complaining. Point out that fussing and fighting are not part of happiness. Develop a reasonable plan to reward cooperation with positive activities, not money or presents.



How best to deal with the holiday throngs?

Develop a travel adventure/disaster plan. Be sure to allow extra time to deal with time pressures and delays. Arrive at the airport with ample time to stand in line. Take along some snacks and activities from your enjoyment kit. Check airline regulations ahead of time to expedite your passage through security in the experienced traveler line. If you are driving, start early and schedule short breaks every two hours or so. Talk with your family about your adventure and express curiosity about different parts of the country or even differences in airports and customs. Be delighted with any positive travel success and, as much as possible, avoid feelings of anger and frustration as you encounter travel problems.

Look forward to enjoying holiday time with your extended family but also make a plan to deal with difficulties and tensions. You might begin by bringing small gifts or cards for your hosts. Enlist the children in this project, as they often enjoy drawing cards or making gifts for others. Once there, plan to pitch in and help with food or cleanup activities. Discuss this with your children ahead of time so that they will be prepared to arrive with a cooperative attitude. Do your part to help with the festivities but not so much that you will feel overburdened or resentful. Plan some of your own activities including breaks from family functions, naps, walks, reading and so

forth. Consider whether you need to develop a psychological boundary plan to deal with relatives who may be intrusive, controlling or otherwise problematic. Be sure to discuss these plans with your spouse or partner ahead of time so that your strategy is mutual.

Plan for a re-entry period when you return home so that you are not abruptly thrust into regular activities. Without a re-entry period, vacations often turn sour and stress is magnified. Have time to unpack, check email, etc., but also experience some personal and family time during the final moments of your holiday.

You can find additional information on my website, www.BettyPhillipsPsychology.com including two articles about personal boundaries, an article about coping

with holiday stress ("Jingle Bells") and advice about coping with holiday depression ("Tis the Season to be Jolly.")

After you finish all your preparations, enjoy your holiday.

Need advice?

Send Dr. Betty Phillips questions about individual, relationship, marriage or family issues to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

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