

# Avoid family burnout during the holiday season

8 December 2017

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The holidays often mean family time, but can you have too much of a good thing? Baylor College of Medicine's Dr. Karen Lawson discusses what you can do to prevent experiencing family burnout.

"I would describe family [burnout](#) as the feeling of not having satisfactory interactions with family members. If someone is truly experiencing family burnout then sometimes it is important to let some time elapse before another outing or before another event with family members that bring out those [feelings](#) in us," said Lawson, a [clinical psychologist](#) and assistant professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor.

To prevent experiencing family burnout, she gave the following tips:

## Plan ahead

Thinking through what you would like the holidays to be like and what kinds of activities are best done in smaller or larger groups can help. Also, if there are dynamics that have not worked well in the past then it is important to acknowledge this and avoid the topics and situations that will cause stress. If you know a person in the family will cause you too much stress, it may be better to avoid that person altogether.

## Practice self-care

Although time can be limited and there are many tasks that have to get done, remembering to practice self-care always is important. It is essential to not overeat or overdrink and to get a full night's sleep, Lawson said.

## Have realistic expectations

Around the holidays we often see picturesque magazine spreads featuring perfect [holiday](#) scenarios. However, this is not reality. Recognizing

what your [family](#) is like, what your budget is and what timeframe you have to work within will help curtail [unrealistic expectations](#) about how the holidays should run.

Lawson added that if you need space there is a way to let your [family members](#) know without hurting their feelings.

"It's important to acknowledge how you are feeling and to not feel like you are being forced to continue to be in a situation when you are not enjoying it," she said. "It is perfectly acceptable to say to the host that you need to leave for a little while, but that you'll be back for dinner. If you don't want to leave, you can ask if there is something you can help with so you'll be occupied."

Going for a short walk also is a good way to get a small break, Lawson said.

"Overall, the holidays can't be looked at as a grand maneuver of avoiding [stress](#). Instead, the holidays should be a time we look forward to, especially with relatives whom we may not often get to see," Lawson said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

APA citation: Avoid family burnout during the holiday season (2017, December 8) retrieved 1 December 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-family-burnout-holiday-season.html>

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