

2012, Holiday Traditions
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.
(first published in the 1980s in The Coffee Cup Newsletter)

Holiday Traditions

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Families have their own unique traditions which provide order and structure to family living. Traditions are beliefs, stories, customs, ways of doing things that are handed down from generation to generation. These long established customs or practices take on the effect of unwritten laws or rules in the family. Families typically do not question their traditions and view those customs as the "normal way of doing things" or as the way that "things are supposed to be done".

Traditions seem to take on a life of their own. Family traditions tend to be rooted in practicality and as they are passed down through the generations, they go unquestioned or unchallenged and may operate independently of the original circumstances which produced the custom. They may also lead to a sense of "should". The original context is lost over time, but the "should" remains.

Family traditions are at no time more noticeable than around the holidays. When two people come together from their families of origin to marry, they often marvel at how "weird" their spouse's family customs and traditions are. Because we believe that these customs are the "right way" to do things, others' customs that contradict ours, must be wrong. Often the traditions from the families of origin conflict and the new couple must struggle to find their own way amidst the contradictions and conflicts.

Traditions can represent a kind of wisdom, but true wisdom is generative rather than stagnant. Wisdom is about following the wisest course of action, based on knowledge, experience, understanding, and good judgement. Wisdom, in this sense is broadly based in current, as well as historical, context.

Family traditions can be ever expanding and evolving as contexts change. Families with small children, or step-families with children, for example, often run themselves ragged on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day burning up the highways to show up at all the houses where they are "expected" as "tradition dictates". The stress levels around the holidays are high enough without adding additional stress based on unreasonable expectations. Various parts of the family no longer live down the block from each other, but live in different parts of the country. Trying to make it to everyone's house for Christmas may not be a reasonable goal. Each new generation in a family can create new traditions and modify old ones as reality dictates. Families can get creative as they try to reconcile old traditions with new ones and discover ways of making holidays more enjoyable and less stressful. A new family tradition might be to stay at home and invite the various family components to a big dinner or family get-together on a day other

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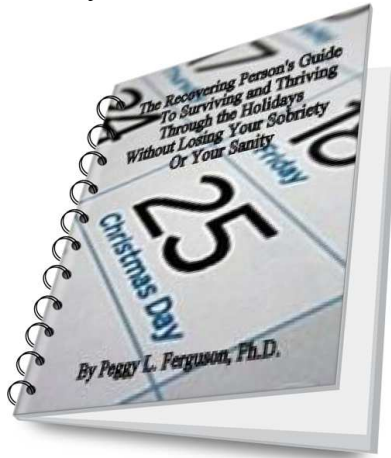
<https://sites.google.com/site/honeyjarcouplescommunication/>

www.howtoovercomeholidaystressanddepression.wordpress.com

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than Christmas, or to spend different holidays with different family members, rotating the holidays.



If you question your traditions and expectations surrounding the holidays, you will be able to enjoy more freedom in making decisions based on what you want rather than unquestioned "shoulds", that always seem to be accompanied by guilt.

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