

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm exhausted and angry. I've just had another holiday where I have been responsible for everything. I do all the shopping, wrapping of presents, decorating, cleaning, and cooking. My husband and kids don't pitch in at all. I work at a full-time job so it's not like I'm just hanging around with nothing else to do. I'll tell you it makes me cranky and already I am not looking forward to Christmas next year.

-- Alice aka "Stressed in December"

Dear Alice aka Stressed in December,

Ouch! What a grim picture you paint of what should be a wonderful, close time for you and your family. The good news is that you have the power to make next Christmas very different.

In days gone by, most women did not work outside the home. Now, don't get me wrong, women have always "worked." From pioneer women facing the harsh realities of life in the wilderness to those raising large families and making ends meet during the great depression, women have always contributed tremendously to the welfare of their families.

Because historically in the United States, most women have worked exclusively *inside* the home, many of the responsibilities for cleaning, cooking and social connections have fallen to us. But guess what? In today's world, the majority of women (including women with working spouses) work *outside* the home as well as inside. It no longer makes sense to assume that women should be the only ones responsible for all the household chores in addition to earning a share of the family income.

Alice, it's time to be assertive with your family. You don't mention in your letter if you have talked to your husband and kids about what you need from them. If you haven't, it's time to do so now. If you have, you'll have to say it again more clearly and firmly.

Sit down with your family when you are *not* feeling angry and stressed and kindly and lovingly tell them how you want things to be different next year. Do it now, and be specific.

Tell them that you want the holidays to be a time when you all feel closer as a family. Ask for their suggestions about how you all might share the shopping, wrapping, decorating, and cooking in ways that give rise to togetherness and conversation instead of stress and anger.

Many of us have cherished childhood memories of making cookies with our mothers or grandmothers or decorating the tree with our parents. These are the kinds of memories that your family can be creating now. Christmas and other meaningful holidays should be fun -- not a source of aggravation and stress.

Regardless of how old your children are, they can and should participate in chores that need to be done. You know your kids and what is age-appropriate for each of them, I'm sure.

Alice, make a decision right now that next year will be different. First, look carefully at how your family is celebrating the holidays. Are you doing things because you feel that others expect them, rather than because they come from your heart?

Do you buy expensive gifts that put you in debt, rather than small, symbolic things that express your love and connection? Do you feel that you have to spend weeks baking because that's the way things were always done in your family, even though you don't like to bake? If so, take baking off your list and buy some nice frozen pies (I believe that God made Mrs. Smith for those of us who don't like to bake).

As a family, create your own traditions, ones that fit your life and preferences.

You don't mention in your letter whether you feel overburdened and responsible for more than your fair share at other times of the year as well as during Christmas. Are you "Stressed in Every Month As Well As December?"

If this is the case, then letting your family know now what you need from them becomes even more important if you want to feel close not cranky.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direction questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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