

BANANAS HANDOUT

Holiday Colors, Red And Green Or Just Plain Blue

The joyous holiday season is here, but will it be as joyous as we expect? Giving...receiving...baking...creating...memories of childhood happiness....but, was it as joyous as we'd like to remember?

Now is a good time to think seriously about the coming holiday season. It is a good time to plan how you want the days to be for you and for your children as well as for your other family and friends. Time taken now to sort out your own feelings and expectations may help secure you the joys you'll want to remember.

First, find some quiet time to think about past holidays. Were they happy or sad occasions? Were there special people who made the holiday happy (or sad) who have died? Gone away? Will you miss them very much this year? When you were a child, was your family together at holiday time or were there family troubles which became more intense during this season? Come to terms with your own past experiences. Admit to yourself, openly, that certain people won't be with you this time, that you have new and different family ties. Knowing what helped make past holidays happy or sad will help you create expectations for the season which might reasonably come true.

Secondly, look around at all the commercial and public versions of the holidays. Don't be sold expectations that aren't yours. Try to set your own goals. There are many ways to celebrate without bowing to cultural pressures.

Here are some specific suggestions:

- 1. When pressures from your family and friends begin, ask yourself what you really want to do for the celebration.** Ask the children (no matter how young) what they want and incorporate some of their ideas into your plans. You'll have better success if you include everyone in the planning rather than trying to prepackage the event yourself. There is no reason for one adult to plan and execute the entire celebration. Have the children assume responsibility for gift making and wrapping, decorations, etc. Ask everyone what was the worst part of last year's holiday – eliminate that!
- 2. What if your family is separated or divorced this year and the children's time must be divided?** The adults involved should try to come to an agreement before the holiday pressures build up. Tell the children very

clearly where they will be and who will be with them. Even if this information is painful to you, the children must hear it often – ahead of time, at the time, and after the time. Comments like “You are going to be with daddy next year.” “You seem to miss mommy.” “This year is certainly different from last.” “Our family isn't together like we were before” are good. Simple statements, spoken calmly and, if possible, without bitterness (practice, if this will be difficult), will help your children know that you can understand their feelings, and that if they want to talk to you about those feelings, you will listen.



Invite guests to your house. It doesn't really matter if there aren't enough dishes or chairs. Don't wait for other people to ask you. If a relationship has ended and you're now a single parent, your house is still a home and your children might enjoy sharing the holidays in their own surroundings.

- 3. Giving can be educational, joyful and meaningful.** Remember that actual gift giving is just a small part of the holidays. Think of alternative gifts – they don't have to be toys or candy; a special gesture is a gift. Use words and affection to tell your children what they mean to you and what holidays mean. Tell stories about your experiences as a child on the holiday – memories are a wonderful gift. Homemade gifts are nice but many of us do work outside the home, so don't get carried away. Children should be encouraged to make gifts and cards for whomever they want. No matter how lumpy or imperfect, anything a child has actually made is more meaningful than a gift which has been put together mostly by an adult.
- 4. Holiday time is a time when children (and adults!) can be very sensitive.** Too many sweets and too much excitement can make children cranky and extra tired, and feelings can be easily hurt. Have an extra large and nutritious breakfast at least on the big day(s). Protect yourself and your children in more ways than one with nutritious meals.