



SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE PROJECT

e-newsletter

Things to Think About!

Early Planning = Holiday Fun

By Linda Jorgensen

I know I've written several times before about managing the Holidays while attempting to stay sane but after four years of hard work my husband and I have *finally* gotten into a Holiday routine that actually works well for us. We start in September.

Now, September may not seem the proper time to be writing about planning for the upcoming holiday season but who wants to be running around, short notice, trying to put together last minute costume ideas on Halloween morning? Or preparing that last dish for Thanksgiving dinner 30 minutes before you are due to sit down at the table? And you can FORGET the all night gift wrapping sessions Christmas Eve. We're done! We want to stay sane, awake, and have enough energy to actually enjoy the happy chaos and mayhem that the Holidays can be at our house. Since Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas are all clustered together we plan for all 3 of them at the same time. For us, September is the perfect time for upcoming Holiday planning.

Priority #1 Parental Preservation

After Labor Day it's time to kick this one into over drive. Take care of yourselves, first. With all the back to school demands of IEP meetings, PTA fundraisers, extra evaluations and other obligations added to the routine we often ended up feeling run down and then falling ill with the first cold that comes marching down the pike. All of the Holidays are much more fun if everyone stays healthy. For us this means we get our flu shots as soon as possible.

We've found that getting flu shots as soon as they become available is a huge help. Eating properly, frequent hand washing, scheduling personal quiet time and getting adequate sleep all help avoid many of the illnesses that start floating around at this time of the year.

Next, get out your big calendar and schedule your personal time, date time and family time. Yes, I said "schedule". I block out time on the family calendar to spend time reading a book or soaking in the tub. If someone calls and the time slot is taken we find an open time slot for them somewhere else. Stick to your exercise routine. Take warm baths and get plenty of sleep. Make sure you and your spouse have a weekly date night on the calendar. We have ours set for 4pm every Friday night. Saturday afternoon is for family play and time together. We also get any known events for the next few months up on the calendar now so we don't over schedule later. Take care of you and your family first. You'll feel better and so will everyone else around you.

Priority #2 The Budget!

I know this is everyone's favorite topic. We all worry about it! How are we going to spend our money wisely but still get what we need and would like without breaking our bank? After we go over our family schedule we put away the credit cards and go over our Holiday Budget. This is the time to figure out what we need or would like for the next three holidays. Do we need to change up some of our fall and Halloween décor? How are we for Thanksgiving supplies? Did the dishes survive last year's feast or do we need to replace some?

And then there is the all important Christmas budget. We look at the funds in our Christmas club account. This account holds all the funds we save over the year to use for the three big holidays. We check all our lists and then we assign a dollar amount to everything. We make a list for each item or activity, note the allotted dollar amount next to each and then we make several copies of the list. A Master copy goes in our budget book which we use to track all our spending and our balances, another in my handbag and hubby keeps one in his wallet. This way we don't over spend and we stay on track with the purchases we need. NO buying things that aren't on the list or cost more than we have budgeted. If you want it and it isn't on "The List", get creative and find another way to pay for it.

Priority #3 One Month at a Time Start with Halloween

The best thing we've found is to take things one month at a time. Obviously Halloween is the first holiday on the calendar. We've learned that this is one holiday we keep to a dull roar at our house. The spook factor is a bit much for our sensory sensitive kids to handle so we tone it down. I decorate the house for the fall season and then add in several "friendly" witches, Jack O' Lanterns and the occasional friendly ghost the week before Halloween night. We aren't in any competition with the neighbors over who has the most creepy/gory/spooky Haunted House and light show on the block. We just want to have fun and for us, this is fun. Once all the trick-or-treaters are gone we take down the spooky stuff and add a few Thanksgiving items to the Fall décor still in place. Decorating for Thanksgiving is done.

And while it may sound a bit strange this is also the time we hang our Christmas lights on the house. Weather in our area is notorious for getting bad very quickly so if we want lights on the house without endangering my husband's life or limbs we get them put up now while the weather is good and the roof is still dry. We just don't flip the switch until after Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving and the Gobbler

Thanksgiving can be another overloaded holiday. Take too much food, too many relatives with unreal expectations, cram them all into a small space like the family dining room and you've just created the perfect set up for melt downs. We've found that maintaining that safe zone I've talked about before is a great strategy. This designated safe place is the same as it always is at our house. We've done this enough years in a row now so the rest of the family knows where it is, what it's for, and some of the family uses it, too. Having a reliable, predictable place to hide out when the outside world becomes even more overwhelming than usual helps decrease anxiety and promote calm. It may not be Norman Rockwell picture perfect but it works for us. Just make sure everyone gets called in time for dinner or be sure to take them a plate.

Christmas and the Grinch

Now we turn on the Christmas lights. Since we put them up in October we don't have to worry about the state of the roof. We just flip the switch and they turn on! Our spending was set back in September, too, so a lot of our shopping is already done along with a lot of the gift wrapping. The credit cards are safely tucked away in their neat hidey places and we're double checking our activity schedule.

It's really easy to go into overload in December. There's a lot of awesome stuff that goes on during the month and many try to attend every activity for fear they will miss out on something! Trying to attend every function and activity often results in a lack of sleep and downtime that can make the most fearsome Grinch out of even the mildest mannered person. We've learned to slow down. Since we wrote our schedule for the month back in late September (leaving a little flexibility for Aunt Susie because we know she schedules family parties very last minute) we know when all our important family events are. We left a little room for flexibility if something really cool comes up but we instead of just adding it to an already busy calendar we exchange it for another activity. Want to go to this concert? Great! But cancel another activity in its place. Keep the same number of activities but change what those activities may be. We've noticed this helps us balance the more important or desired events against the "busy" activities that can come up. We also cancel therapy visits during the last two weeks in December if possible. We're doing other fun things and it's a great break. Don't over load your calendar.

The last and most important thing is to periodically unplug. Yep. I said it. Unplug. We're focusing on what we're doing and not what everyone else is doing. We can do that after the holidays are over. For right now we set at least one day a week when we turn off the computer, the cell phones, the tablets and even the news and instead take time for games and movies. You don't have to do everything but whatever you do, plan what you like and make it fun.

We've learned that by keeping to our strategy of planning ahead, managing our time and spending, being creative and enjoying time together as a family the holidays are more fun than bah, humbug. So go ahead and plan some fun!

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