

# How to kick back, relax and embrace a less-than-perfect holiday

BusinessMirror · 27 Dec 2024 · B4 · BY KATHERINE ROTH The Associated Press

NEW YORK—WE all know the stressors: Social obligations. Family discord. Political rifts. Financial stress. And the desire to stay cheery and big-hearted throughout. So here's a reminder about how to banish your inner perfectionist and truly enjoy the holiday season:



“It really helps to let go of some of the ‘shoulds,’” says Lynn F. Bufka, head of practice for the American Psychological Association. “Decide on the one thing that matters most, and the things that bring you the most joy, and let go of other things.”

Traditions can shift and change, and the more flexible things are the easier it is for everybody, Bufka says. “Focus your energy on creating a warm space for the people you love to gather and relax, catch up and celebrate one another. That’s literally all that matters,” agrees Lauren Iannotti, editor in chief of Real Simple.

Some tips:

- Throw yourself into the parts of the holiday

that make you happy. You could decide that conversation is your main goal, and not worry at all about the decor, says Bufka. Or if table decoration is what you love, spend your energy there and don’t worry as much about other aspects.

“Ideally, it should be about focusing on love, and that doesn’t mean the same thing to everyone,” says Bufka.

Don’t hesitate to outsource some of that other stuff. “People want to help—let them!” says Iannotti. “If you don’t LOVE cooking all those sides, or are strapped for time, there is zero shame in accepting your sister’s offer to do the stuffing. Or enlist help from the pros—support a local restaurant by ordering some catering platters.”

A potluck can be your friend. “Have everyone bring one signature dish,” says Iannotti. “You’ll save time and money on prep and cooking and your guests can show off their skills.”

■ Give yourself permission to cut corners. “It’s OK if the house is a little messy or dinner is on the table a few minutes late,” says Iannotti. “If the people you’ve invited are more interested in grading your performance than having a good time, they can take that up with their therapist to sort through.”

(They’re not, by the way—“something to maybe take up with your therapist,” she adds.) And don’t hesitate to let people help themselves, when possible. “If you don’t have time to play bartender, create a signature drink ahead of time that can serve all of your guests. You can also just leave out a few mixers so guests can serve themselves and make their own creations,” suggests Caroline Utz, editorial and strategy director at The Spruce.

■ It’s OK to step away for alone time. Things will run well enough if you’re not overseeing it all, so take care of yourself. Take breathers or walks if that helps you stay centered. “Although mindfulness is becoming an overused term in society today, there is something of value we can take from this and apply to the holiday season,” says Brook Choulet, a concierge sports and performance psychiatrist and founder of Choulet Performance Psychiatry.

She recommends “scheduling intentional microbreaks” to do something you enjoy.

“For example, you may schedule a phone call with a friend out of state, take a 15-minute walk outside, or even set the timer and take a 15-minute bath uninterrupted,” she said.

■ Expect some discord, and don’t get freaked about it. “If you’re worried about the polarization and getting into uncomfortable conversations, try to think about ways you can end a conversation, or shift it in another direction,” Bufka says.

She recommends preparing a few lines in advance to help end the conversation or shift it in another direction. So, aiming for a less-than-perfect holiday season may just be the sweet spot. ■