

Standing Up to The Grinch and Other Christmas Joy-Robbers

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By: *Phyllis Sphan, LPC, RDN, LDN*

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year” is easily recognized as the first line of a favored Christmas song. How is it then that we often feel like we have just experienced a face-to-face encounter with the Grinch? You know him, the malevolent storybook character that created havoc during the Christmas season before his transformation to the kind, loving, and generous Grinch that he becomes. We are led to wonder how to keep the joy-robbers at bay and Christmas meaningful and joy-filled? How can we manage to rise above the stressed busyness that threatens the true reasons of why we celebrate?

Strive for a Well-Balanced Perspective

Ask yourself if the details you may be stressing over are really going to make a difference in the big picture. Often times, things on which we expend emotional and physical energy really do not matter at the end of the day. Recently, one of my daughters exclaimed, “Mom, I can’t believe that you have a naked Christmas tree in our home!” After a delay in decorating the tree due to problems with the lights that are not supposed to go out (how many of you can relate to that?), followed by a busy week, and an unplanned trip out of town, our tree was left beautifully lit, but undecorated. As time went by, I found it rather liberating to not be worrying about the “naked tree”! Scaling back from the norm and letting go of small details that you may be holding onto this time of year can greatly reduce stress.

Reach Out to Help Others

This can be done by volunteering and in simple ways, such as “paying it forward” with acts of kindness to others. Pay for the order of the people in the car behind you in the fast food line; pick up the tab for another table in a restaurant; take a bag of groceries to a local agency or food shelter, and so on. While your generosity benefits others and encourages the downtrodden and lonely, you will certainly be blessed as well.

Establish New Traditions

Holidays often pose difficult challenges for those who have experienced losses of many kinds during the previous year. They can be painful reminders of the absence of a loved one, unfulfilled dreams, and disappointments. Celebrating in different ways and beginning new traditions can lessen the pain and remind us that we must live on and find joy in new surroundings and even new relationships.

Adopt an Attitude of Gratitude

Reminding ourselves of our blessings and listing the things for which we are grateful can be tremendously helpful in working through any present, seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Project positivity by saying and thinking positive statements when you feel tapped out. Practicing these steps can have unending benefits by helping you feel better about yourself and others. In addition, they often help others be more inclined to be positive with you.

Take Care of Your Health

The dietitian in me must remind you that what you eat is always essential. All of us function better when consuming healthier diets. In addition, physical activity makes a big difference in how we feel both physically and emotionally. This is especially true when stress abounds and we feel like we just don't have the time to eat well or to exercise. Pay attention to your mental health. If you find yourself down in the dumps, overwhelmed with bouts of sadness, unable to enjoy activities that normally bring you joy, or other signs of depression, do not suffer in silence. Seek guidance from your health care professionals, your pastor, or talk with a counselor. Having a trusted person to process your feelings with can make all the difference in how you live.

Lastly, and very importantly, take care of your spiritual self. Carve out time to focus on the true meaning of the Christmas season. Find a favorite author whose writing helps to settle your busy mind. Reflect on the incredible birth of our amazing Savior by attending a concert, a candle-lighting service, or lessons and carols. Minister to yourself through prayer, scripture, Advent devotionals, and quiet moments of gratitude for the greatest gift ever given.

Now, have yourself a Merry Christmas and enjoy "the most wonderful time of the year"!

Submitted by Phyllis Spahn, Licensed Professional Counselor and Registered/Licensed Dietitian Nutritionist of The Rapha House – A Counseling Ministry of ChristChurch Presbyterian of Dalton