

Taking the Stress Out of Holiday Hosting

Imagine the perfect holiday party. Chances are your vision doesn't look exactly like anyone else's. Some people love trying out ideas for spray painted pumpkins and personalized wine glass charms. For others, it's all about testing yet another strategy for roasting a flawless turkey. Most of us would agree, though, that our favorite holiday *memories* are about people. We value those moments of reconnecting with an old friend we haven't seen in years or sharing a laugh with our siblings while helping out with the dishes.

Keep that in mind when you tackle the daunting task of hosting a holiday get-together. It's more important to make your guests feel welcome than to set a gorgeous table. Here are some tips for hosting a holiday party without making yourself crazy.

Prioritize and plan

Pick the elements of the party that are most important to you, and make a plan for how to get those elements right. If you enjoy decorating, make that a fun weekend activity a few weeks before the big day. You won't be as stressed, and you'll have more time to enjoy the decorations yourself. If you love to cook, decide on a signature dish or two that you know will be fabulous. Then, do as much of the shopping and prep ahead of time as possible. Everyone likes old favorites at the holidays (and you *really* don't need surprises one hour before your guests arrive), so this may not be the time to try a new, complicated recipe.

Get help

You're not the only one with a signature dish! Enlist close friends and relatives to round out the holiday menu, teaming up for an assortment of family favorites. Ask the teens on your guest list if they can take charge of some fun activities for your younger guests. If you can afford it, you may want to consider hiring a cleaning team a few days before your event so you're not too tired to enjoy your company, or ordering some food from a local restaurant.

Expect a bit of chaos

Spoiler alert: *something* is going to go wrong. Your aunt might show up without the salad she promised, and with five extra guests. People will gather in your crowded kitchen no matter how many scented candles and extra chairs you add to the living room. There's an excellent chance that the relative who always complains about the food, lectures about politics, or comments loudly about other guests' weight gain will once again complain, lecture or comment loudly.

So, what are you going to do about it? There's not much you *can* do, except try to keep your sense of humor. Parties are for people, and people are messy and unpredictable and complicated. That's ok. Take a deep breath and...



Enjoy yourself!

This is the most important piece of advice, for two reasons. First, you've worked hard to make this event happen, so you deserve to have fun. Second, nobody *else* can really have fun if you're a wreck. Try to plan the meal so you can sit down, appreciate all of the wonderful food, and pay attention to your guests. Set up food buffet style so you don't spend the whole meal serving, and decide whether you're going to opt for team dishwashing or let the dishes sit until the next morning. Finally...

Say thank you

Take some time during the event (or pick up the phone afterwards) to let people know how much you appreciated their help and enjoyed their company. This is a great chance to let people know what they mean to you.

Hosting holiday gatherings is a lot of work, and a generous gift to the people you love. *Give yourself* a big pat on the back for inviting people into your home to share the holidays with you. Make sure to schedule in some downtime after the big day. Treat yourself to a massage, a relaxing evening or weekend away, or just an extra hour in bed in the morning. You deserve it!

The holiday season can be a busy, stressful time. If you're feeling overwhelmed, call your EAP to talk to a provider. You can also learn to better manage your stress with MHN's EAP member website.

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MHN106832 MCA-42-1171 (10/13)

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