

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Positive Family Get-Togethers During the Holidays”*

The holidays are for young and old and everyone in between. That is also what can make getting together particularly challenging for families. It may be stressful, and it may be that time once or twice a year where you are getting together with people you may not necessarily have the greatest relationship with. However, families do get together, and despite any uncomfortable dynamics, the time can be positive and uplifting. You just must do your best to face the holidays with a positive attitude.

If you go into holiday gatherings with a positive attitude, you're going to be happier and healthier and you're just going to enjoy yourself more. Which will make the day, week, or however long you're with your family a lot better.

When we are stressed or worried, whether that be about family relationships or other matters, we may not sleep well or make poor food choices and not make time for exercises. When we go into these multi-generation holiday gatherings, go into it ready to have fun and truly enjoy each other's company. These are such great opportunities to learn from different generations and create lasting memories that will be cherished forever.

Here are tips to help make the most of your holiday gatherings.

Play: Research and life experience shows us that people of all ages are happier and healthier when we play together and when we participate in family leisure activities together. Play time as family equates to bonding time, which opens the door to exciting, new family holiday traditions. It doesn't have to be some sort of structured activity, or anything that costs a lot of money. It could be something as simple as gathering your board games from your house and taking them over to where the party is being held. Card games, ugly sweater contests, white elephant gifts, a canned food drive for the local shelter, or a neighborhood scavenger hunt. Playing and giving together creates family bonds, a better overall environment, and happy and healthier individuals.

Communicate in advance with all the family and have some structure: Talk in advance about when mealtime is going to be. Discuss the menu. Do you have family members with conditions to consider? Diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, dementia, Parkinson's Disease, etc. Who will be preparing what? It's better to communicate this beforehand to share the stress load of preparing large amounts of food, and creating a happier, healthier environment. If you know there are family relationships that are strained, you may consider having different activities planned to spread everyone out or creating spaces where family members can "get away" and get a chance to have a breather from the day's activities. You may even consider having rooms ready for naps, should anyone young or old need them. Bottom line is to communicate, stay positive, and we hope you have a great time! Merry Christmas and Happy New Years!