



SOLUTIONS

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Handling Family CONFLICT and Holiday STRESS

The holidays represent many opportunities to bond with family, but this time of year may also present significant stress, particularly when family conflict arises. This may come from having to decide which relatives to see and leave out, or not seeing any relatives at all. Here are some hints for dividing time during the holidays and handling conflicts which seem destined to arise.

Take Turns with Relatives. Do you and your spouse both want to celebrate with your families of origin? Has divorce caused a situation where not everyone wants to celebrate together? Do you simply have a really big family? These scenarios make it stressful to decide who to see, and when. Try taking turns. If you see one group at Thanksgiving, see the other group at Christmas, or alternate years. Eventually, you will see everyone.

Host Celebrations at Your House. If the stress of traveling is more than you can cope with, have the extended family come to your house. This is also preferable when you have too many groups or relatives to take turns seeing: invite everyone to celebrate together, and you will see everyone more often (if that is the goal). This won't be feasible in every situation, but it builds bonds between groups of relatives that may not know one another very well.

Be Prepared for Some Conflict. If conflict usually surfaces when family gets together, anticipate and prepare for it. Don't go looking for trouble, but approach the situation with a sense of realism. If mom criticizes your appearance or your brother makes rude jokes, don't expect them to change their habits; just have a sense of humor about it and remind yourself what you love about them.

Just Say No. If seeing family causes great amounts of stress each year, it's OK to say no to invites sometimes. Celebrating with just your partner or children can be a wonderful alternative to seeing people who make you feel consistently stressed.

Surround Yourself with Friends. Many happy holidays have been formed by groups of people who have decided to celebrate with friends instead of family. Whether you're unable to travel or for some other reason find yourself without kin, celebrating with other people you know who are also without family for the day (elderly shut-in, member of military, pastor or visitor from another country) can be a great way to bond with friends and enjoy the spirit of the season.

Above all else, be mindful of the very reasons that you are celebrating.

MANAGING TEST AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Have you or your child ever been freaked out over a test? Now imagine being freaked out for every test. Some people have an overreaction and/or negative perception about tests and other times they must perform. Moreover, it seems like it gets worse each time. Without intervention, test or performance anxiety can cause significant emotional and physical distress.

Anxiety and fear are normal survival mechanisms. Anxiety produces fear, negative emotions, and heightened physical states that are uncomfortable and cause us to seek a method of increasing comfort. Anxiety is often met with avoidance or overcompensating instead of directly addressing or managing the situation.

With some basic understanding and strategic action plans, you and your child can be on your way to dealing with these issues and becoming happier and healthier:

➤ Use Common Sense about Anxious Situations

- Test or performance anxiety is normal. It is not a mental illness, and can be effectively reduced.
- Goals should match your ability.
- Past embarrassments can be put back in the past.
- Negative thinking increases normal anxiety to the point of becoming overwhelming.

➤ Steps to Reduce Test and Performance Anxiety

Use Relaxation for Physical Anxiety and Positive Thoughts for Cognitive Anxiety:

- Deep Breathing
 1. Start with exhaling all your air – breathe OUT for 3 to 5 seconds
 2. Breathe IN for 3 to 5 seconds
 3. HOLD breath for 3 to 5 seconds
 4. Breathe OUT for 3 to 5 seconds
 5. Repeat the In, Hold, and Out - 3 more times
- Think positively and optimistically! Positive thinking examples are:
“It’s ok to be anxious.” “It isn’t the end of the world.” “I have handled anxiety in the past.”
“I have a lot of tools and preparation to help me do my best.”

➤ Avoid alcohol and drugs.

➤ Get help from your EAP if anxiety continues.



The New Rules of the Road

Buckling up of back-seat passengers, bicyclists getting more share of the road, less tinting on windows, and slower-moving sightseers keeping to the right lane should be just a few of the things you're seeing on Louisiana highways since new state traffic laws went into effect on August 15.

One, Two...Buckle Me, Buckle You. Seat belts are for everyone. Passengers seated in both the front and rear seats of automobiles, vans, and pick-up trucks must buckle up. Not only is this the right thing to do, it is also the economic thing to do. Unbuckled occupants are subject to fines. Seat belts, if worn, could immediately reduce the number of deaths and injuries occurring annually on our roadways

Your Space...or Mine? For the protection of bicyclists, drivers must maintain a safe distance of no less than 3 feet when passing a bicyclist. That distance must be maintained until the vehicle is safely past the bike.

Lighten Up! Tinted windows may be trendy, but also pose a risk. Dark tint makes it hard for drivers to check their blind spots, especially at night. They also pose a safety risk for officers who can't see inside vehicles they pull over until it may be too late. Under the new law, you will need to have your physician provide a sworn affidavit outlining the needs of your specific medical condition if you want to tint your windows darker than legal limits.

Life in the Fast Lane. Lingering in the left lane is now a no-no on multi-lane roadways. The new law makes the left lane off limits except for passing, when preparing to turn at an intersection, or when the right lane is congested.