

Thriving During the Teenage Years – Isn't It The Season to Be Jolly?

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The holiday season is supposed to be a time for family get-togethers and celebration. Most families look forward to this special time of the year. A time for renewal of the love and warmth that family represents. Too often, however, it becomes a time of family conflict and struggle. In the counseling industry, there is often a spike in referrals after school holidays. This is usually the result of underlying dysfunctional family dynamics flourishing in an environment of ongoing family interaction. Let's open our "Happy Holiday Family Survival Kit" and consider the following strategies:

1. The L Word: Generally speaking, we are terrible at expressing our positive feelings for each other. On the other hand, we tend to be masterful at expressing our negative feelings. This is a critical issue within the family. As parents we often feel love, pride, and caring for our children, but rarely do we verbalize it. Our children and others are not mind readers and desperately need to hear it.

2. Quality Time: Consider empowering your children by giving them the opportunity to suggest some family activities. After they brainstorm a list of family activities, pick the ones that sound good to you and make an effort to do them. While all of your time need not be structured, too much boredom and down time often leads to negative behavior and conflict.

3. Choosing Your Battles: Focus on the big picture; having an enjoyable time as a family and try not to let the smaller discipline issues become the focus of family interaction. You can always provide minimal feedback, make a mental note, and revisit it after the holidays.

4. The L Word: I know I mentioned it already, but we really are terrible at it. Make an effort to provide your child with genuine positive feedback. When you feel something positive, make sure you verbalize it.

5. The Element of Surprise: Think about some activities that you know your children will enjoy (see #2) and surprise them with it, letting them know that you are doing it because of something positive that they have done in the recent past (see #4).

6. If All Else Fails, Consider the C Word: If despite all of these efforts significant family dysfunction continues then consider benefiting from counseling. In many cases, short-term family therapy with a skilled provider can result in significant outcomes. The basic elements of love, nurturance, effective communication and empowerment are at the heart of what makes any family system strong. It just takes effort to nourish and maintain them. Happy Holidays!