Consider Simplified Holidays

When did we decide the holidays needed to be a big production, with lots of gifts and over-the-top decorations? Wouldn’t it be nice to just enjoy the season, and our family, without breaking the bank? There’s no reason we can’t, really. Maybe it’s time we let go of the pressures of commercialism and trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

For weeks leading up to the fall and winter holidays, the stress starts to build. It can make us cranky and tired, which may make us feel like not celebrating the holidays at all. Making things simpler and less stressful takes a little bit of planning, but it may be worth it.

Filling the house with store-bought decorations (however beautiful they may be) sometimes lacks the sentiment of the holidays. Instead of searching for the latest trend in holiday decorations, take a break and make homemade decorations with your kids. Making paper snowflakes, gingerbread men, wreaths, and other holiday-inspired décor that covers your walls puts a smile on your kids’ faces, and adds a bit of charm to your home.

String your tree (or anything else) with popcorn garlands and do-it-yourself (DIY) bulbs. There are so many online sites that can show you step-by-step instructions to make your own cute and inexpensive decorations. Create your own holiday wreath and hang it on your front door. Cover it in the things your kids love—mini base-

balls, tiny dancers, or anything else your family loves to do.

Who doesn’t love holiday treats? Making cookies, breads, and other treats with your kids will become fond memories that they can share with their own children. You can then deliver the treats to neighbors in the spirit of the holiday season! Follow that up with some warm cocoa, and you’ve created a new holiday tradition.

Homemade gifts from kids to parents are treasured. There is no reason adults can’t make gifts too. A photo album, a blanket, a coveted recipe—whatever you’re good at, make it—and give it to your loved ones. The time and love you put into a gift will shine through.

Holidays are about spending time with loved ones, and sometimes that gets lost within our own expectations. By making everything simple, you’d be surprised at how much more enjoyment the holidays can bring you.

You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving.

Robert Lewis Stevenson
The Toll of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is an overall term which includes mistreatment of persons in relationships. Although it is primarily considered an attack on females by male partners, it is also the subject of abuse toward males by females, as well as individuals in same-sex relationships. Besides the obvious trauma faced by the abused partner, the extended community is also affected. This includes children, family/friends, and the work community. Some signs family members and/or co-workers can be aware of to assist those in abusive relationships include:

**Isolation**—whether from family/friends, or in the workplace, victims often seclude themselves. This is a “protection” for them so they do not feel the necessity to discuss problems with others. We should be aware of this and not aggressively push them for input. On the other hand, it is necessary to let them know we are there for them if they want to talk.

**Fearfulness**—is a sign of serious problems. Frequently victims of domestic violence place themselves in a physical position where they can directly observe the comings and goings of others. This is a tactic to prepare themselves for a possible confrontation if the abuser approaches. They fear for themselves and others, particularly about the well-being of children and people with whom they work. If you observe such behavior, be aware it may be a protective ploy. Like those in isolation, the fearful person needs the option of sharing or not. Again, be there for them—but do not push as the isolated person needs our patience.

**Aggression**—may manifest itself physically or verbally. If the person did not exhibit this behavior in the past, take note, and pay attention to when the outbursts occur. You may want to be a friend, and elicit if there is something you can do to relieve the underlying situation. Allow him/her the opportunity to ask for help by being a friend.

**Pessimism**—may take over the individual’s thought process. Often the abused individual feels there is no hope, and no matter what he/she does, it will never be good enough. Be supportive and encouraging. You can be the anchor to point the person in a direction of help.

**Depression**—can manifest itself as feelings of hopelessness and helplessness invade the individual’s self-confidence. As depression sets in, some or all of the behaviors of isolation, fearfulness, and aggression may manifest themselves. Be kind and encouraging of the victim. Allow him/her to work through things in his/her time. However, if you are in a position that you can encourage and listen, do so, and avoid making any judgments.

**Low Self-esteem**—is a product of abuse, and it is intensified by any and all of the other signs. Encourage your family member or co-worker to seek help. A referral to the EAP at 402-330-0960 is a good first step. This is a confidential contact, and it is a step in the right direction.