

The Holidays are Over Now What? An Emotional Check Up

Contributed by Laurie B. Freeman

The presents have been opened, we all feel 10 pounds of extra weight and we've spent time with family. Now that it's January, and the whole year is ahead, I'd like to suggest that instead of the traditional New Year's Resolutions, each of us take a look at our family situations and evaluate how they impact our life. The purpose of this reflection would be to determine if we are happy with the status quo or if we would like to make changes before next year's holiday. In essence, I am suggesting something akin to tax planning. We all have to pay taxes. Can we analyze the last holiday season and determine if we paid too much or just the right amount. If it was too much, is there anything we can do to reduce next year's payment? Parents For those of us who still have living parents, is it worthwhile to examine this relationship? When you are with your parents, do you feel like an adult or do you revert back to the roles of childhood? Are these old roles still useful or even relevant? Are you angry and hurt after spending time with your parents? Could this be because you are carrying old resentments and expectations of them? How likely are your parents to change? Unless they are highly motivated or insightful, people who have lived their lives a certain way are unlikely to change no matter how much they love us. What can potentially change is how we view our relationship with our parents. Many things factor into our openness for change. Perhaps we realize that our parents' health is declining. Maybe we consider the pain that our parents faced in their own lives and as we mature we can better understand how this might have impacted their world view. Finally maybe we get to a point in our life where we just try to forgive them and move on. If there is tension when spending time with parents, consider changing your view of them to reduce this tension, not for them but for you. This is difficult to do alone and may require the aid of an objective person like a therapist. Siblings Siblings share the same upbringing and often know us better and longer than any other person in our lives yet distance can be present both emotionally and geographically. Issues like birth order, perceived favoritism and simply differences in personality can contribute to this distance. When evaluating the sibling relationship it is useful to look at if you were ever close to each other and when this changed. How are you alike and different? If there has been a rivalry since you were both little, what were you competing for? Does this still matter to either of you? Often siblings unite as their parents age and they begin to parent their parents. If you have the opportunity to spend time with your sibling, try to get to know them as they are today. Often our perceptions of our siblings are as they were as children. Be open to the possibility of discovering a new friend in a sibling. Friends Just as we analyze our family relationships, so may you also analyze your friendships. At times when family bonds are tenuous, friends fill in the emotional gaps. Other times friends may disappoint for a variety of reasons. Now might be a good time to review your friendships. Are my friends good friends to me? What kind of a friend am I? Who might I like to get close to this year and how might I accomplish that? As you examine relationships in the post holiday season, consider if they are working for you. If so, keep up the good work. If not would you like for things to be different. Specifically what would you like to change and what would it cost to make that change. Consider being as intentional about your relationship planning as you are about your taxes. In the end, the payoff might be greater.