Handling Stress of Holiday Gatherings

Family gatherings can add stress and anxiety, especially when life hasn't been so great during the past year. Struggles and losses are a part of life, but you don;t necessarily want to be put on the spot by Aunt Betty asking personal questions or cousin Joe telling you what you need to do to fix your life.

Here's my top 3 to avoid excessive stress and panic attacks. Anxiety, stress and panic attacks are fed by the fear of the unknown. Add helpful known ways to handle situations.

1. **Action plan** Be proactive. Know ahead of time what you will do. Write down something short and simple you will say when those nosy relative want to know the details of your life.

For example, state "I've been really busy with work and family." Then **divert** to a question about something they are interested in or excuse yourself to the kitchen or bathroom.
Awkward situation or sensitive subject, plan your exit to get a breather. "Excuse me, I need to go out to my car" or to the bathroom.
Those one liners can be lifesavers. Just knowing you have a plan reduces stress and keeps form being put on the spot.

2. **Boundaries** Healthy boundaries for yourself and others can de-stress whatever holiday stressors come your way.

- Set a financial boundary on spending limits and stick to it. Make sure there is a cushion for unexpected last minute gifts.
- Decide what events and how many you will attend. You do not to make excuses for not attending some festivities. Simply state, "I have other plans." If asked what plans, state again, "I have another commitment." That's not lying as you are making a commitment for self care, to reduce your stress. Purposely creating time to stay at home and away from an event is a plan.

3. Let Go

- The movie perfect holiday does not exist. Let go of that expectation by identifying what's most important during the holidays.
- List your top "have to's" for the holidays. Those tasks, events, festivities, decorations, etc that connect with what's most important.
- List the "want to's," those optional tasks, events, festivities that may be added if time and energy allows.
- List the "I can let go these" items. The extras that add more busyness, stress and take focus away from what's most important.

Put your focus on those top most important things and choose to let them be your guide.

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