

# GREAT LAKES FAMILY

*A magazine published by CLS Communications*

---

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Submit](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertisers](#) | [Rates](#) | [Archive](#) | [Contact](#) | [Search](#)

---

---

## Prepare for the "Holi-daze"

by Kristy Zeluff

---

THE HOLIDAYS.

Did that just send a shudder down your spine? How sad is that, that such a happy word as "Holidays" can cast a pall of doom over our rigorously scheduled lives? I for one have resolved to make a change, and to put some peace back into our holiday season.

This year, I actually asked my kids what they wanted from our holiday celebrations, and then I actually listened. Their answers surprised me, as I bet your kids' would you. It was not the latest game, or the fanciest party, or the most elaborate costume at the Halloween party. They want ME. Time, with me. Time when I am completely in the moment, enjoying simple activities with them, and not edgy and stressed over work or the many chores involved in keeping a family functioning.

I cannot make the non-kid activity demands on my time go away, but I can be absolutely ruthless about protecting our time together as a family. Doing this involves something we as modern-day parents find incredibly difficult: saying NO.

NO to four Halloween parties in one weekend. NO to two Thanksgiving celebrations on the same day. NO to a Christmas or Hanukkah so over-the-top that our kids wind up overwhelmed and jaded.

"I can do that!" you say, "Sounds easy!" But wait until you receive multiple invitations to parties for the weekend before Halloween, which happens to fall on a Monday this year. You can have too much of a good thing. Sure, every one of those parties sounds like fun. But if you try to do it all, you'll get that same sensation you had when you were 9 years old and ate too much candy after trick-or-treating.

Teresa Thrash, a professional organizer with the Portage-based company Organize In a Day, has five key suggestions for managing your time and minimizing your stress during the holiday season:

### 1. Plan Ahead

Get as many events on the calendar as soon as you can, so you don't

accidentally overbook.

## 2. Include Everything

Remember that all your outside activities also include holiday events. Be mentally prepared for time commitments outside your family celebrations, such as classroom parties or church charity drives.

## 3. Be Open

For your own party, consider having an open house instead of a party with fixed times. This allows all of your very busy friends and neighbors to drop in as their schedules allow, and makes everyone feel less pressed if they only have time for a brief visit.

## 4. Be Choosy

Select your holiday activities carefully, choosing those that give you the greatest emotional returns.

## 5. Think of Next Year Now

Look ahead to the next holiday season by taking advantage of the after-holiday sales. Stock up on items you know you will need, so you will not be scrambling to pick them up (and paying full price!) next November.

Each holiday produces unique challenges for the Keeper of the Calendar. Here are some practical suggestions, one holiday at a time, on how to make choices that will enrich your time together as a family.

### Halloween

#### 1. Say "No" to Sewing

Three little words may set you free: buy the costume. Remember, this is about how amazing your kid thinks she looks, not how impressed anyone else is with your costume creation. Go with the plastic Spiderman special that is the coolest thing ever to your first-grader. If you are on a tight budget, give your kids a couple of bucks each and turn them loose at a garage sale or Goodwill - make it a contest to see who can come up with the best costume for the least amount of money.

#### 2. Rethink a Tradition

I finally figured out that I was the family's only real participant in the lengthy, messy and potentially hazardous tradition of carving jack-o-lanterns. Now I hand everyone a pumpkin and a package of markers, and we're all happy... mostly. I still like to carve my pumpkin the old fashioned way, but I no longer insist that my kids stand there while I try to carve whatever crazy design they have devised. The lesson I took from this was two-fold. First, make really sure that the tradition you're clinging to "for the kids" is really "for the kids." And second, you can keep that tradition even if it only pleases you, but you'll save time and stress if you don't insist on

unwilling participants.

## Thanksgiving

### 1. Go Potluck

I admit it. I have only once tried to put on a complete Thanksgiving spread all by myself. Never again! The planning, shopping, cooking, serving and cleaning up eclipsed my entire weekend. In my (large) extended family, we traditionally have a potluck dinner, with specific key dishes assigned to the most reliable attendees. We rent a hall (at a cost of about \$5 per family), and everyone brings his or her own place settings. Clean up is a group effort and over quickly, leaving us with time to play cards, watch some football and cuddle the newest babies. If a family gathering is not an option, gather your friends, and let many hands make light work.

## Christmas and Hanukah

### 1. Be Selective About Activities

This basic principle of time management is most important during the Christmas and Hanukah party season, according to Teresa Thrash of Organize In a Day. "If you've been putting in a lot of time at work, you may want to forgo the office party in favor of an activity with your family," she says. "Spend your time and energy where you get the most return."

### 2. Oust the "Shoulds"

If you are burning the midnight oil trying to create a Currier and Ives Christmas or baking treats for half the known universe, take a good hard look at why. Chances are that the only person who expects these Herculean efforts from you is, well, YOU. If an activity or project feels like an obligation rather than a pleasure, try to let it go.

## Blended Families

My husband and I have five children: his, hers, and ours. My oldest kids and his daughter all have another set of parents, who are also trying to schedule holiday gatherings. And because of divorce and remarriage, our five kids have seven sets of grandparents between them.

Can you say "logistical nightmare"? The only path through this kind of potential madness is paved with compromise and acceptance. Over the years, we have all learned to work together by keeping clear on the number one goal: the peace and happiness of all those kids.

### 1. Be Gracious

When your kids go to their other parent's house for the holiday, resist the impulse to call them every time you miss them. Set a time that you will check in and stick to it. In their book *Ex-Etiquette For Parents: Good Behavior After a Divorce or Separation* (Chicago Review Press, 2004), Jann Blackstone-Ford and Sharyl Jupe offer outstanding advice on sharing your

children during the holidays: "If your child is truly the most important thing in your life, allow him to settle in at his other parent's home so they can enjoy their time together. A constant reminder that you miss him is not putting your child first - it's putting your child in the middle."

## 2. Learn From Your Mistakes

One year, our oldest kids wound up doing three full-blown Christmases in one day. They were completely shell-shocked. I had two choices - change my traditions, or insist on a change to someone else's. We've done a little bit of both. Accept that you will upset some family members, but hold fast and protect your kids from this kind of craziness.

## 3. And Goodwill Toward Men

Unless you are very rare indeed, there are unresolved issues that still cause conflict with your former spouse. Just for one day, strive to let go of the differences that divided you and remember that your kids are worth more than any strife. Who knows? It may feel so good to set aside painful baggage that it could be the first step toward a more peaceful relationship that can only benefit everyone involved.

Kristy Zeluff is a freelance writer and mom who lives in Portage.

Copyright 1998-2006 CLS Communications. All Rights Reserved.