



MATTERS OF THE MIND

Counting Blessings Over the H

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December brings us right into a heavy holiday season with celebrations for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza & New Year's Eve. For many, holidays seem to be a time for rushing around stores looking for the "perfect" gift or the "right" theme for a holiday party, and sometimes becoming more harried than happy, coping with hectic schedules and people everywhere.

At such times, it can be easy to overlook the intent behind celebrating holidays.

Materialism runs rampant in the 21st century, as we see various companies gearing up to promote their goods and services for the holidays sometimes as soon as "Back to School" is done! Maybe it's time to take a breather and get back to basics.

Dr. Bill Doherty, author of "Intentional Families" and researcher and professor of Family Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota, recommends integrating family traditions as one way to bring the true intent of holidays back down to earth.

For some, that may be a

tradition involving serving specific foods for a holiday meal—like lutefisk and lefse for some of us Minnesotans. Other traditions may include the whole family gathering for a religious service or a quiet time of sharing memories. You can also begin to create traditions for your family, perhaps finding a way as a family group to serve others less fortunate. Remember, also, that family can be a family of intent, as well as a family of origin or family of creation, and close friends can factor heavily into that intended family.

Years ago, Dr. Doherty shared one of his family traditions on a radio program on NPR. He recommended it as another way to move toward the **spirit** of giving and away from materialism. In his family, each time someone gives another a present (be it Christmas, birthday or other), the giver must also be prepared to give a verbal gift as well. That verbal gift is an acknowledgement to the recipient of how she or he has given to the family or enriched the family in some way during the past year.

We often take so little time to verbally recognize how

someone special for the coming year. Making the ornaments becomes a celebration in itself and friends usually verbally share their hopes for each other as well. The focus is on simplicity and sharing positive sentiment. Count all your

Coping with Holiday Stress

The pressure is often high for the holiday times to be happy and celebratory. For some, however, it's difficult to be happy. Sometimes the predominant feeling is more in line with holiday blues.

The blues may be related to expectations not being met, either for ourselves, or what we hope to create for our children. Perhaps a job loss has led to feelings of anxiety or feelings of self-doubt or insecurity. Other times, someone is still grieving a loss or experiencing the sadness of missing a loved one during a favorite time of year.

For many, dealing with holiday blues, or even simply the average stress of the holidays, leads to excess. Eating too much, drinking too much, spending too much or too much socializing that leads to a lack of sleep. Each of these excesses leads to increased stress.

Holiday time is not the best time to "just say no" to all the goodies floating around, but it is a good time to practice moderation. Allow yourself tastes rather than full servings, and perhaps not of every single treat.

When at a party, make sure you aren't drinking on an empty stomach. Alternate water or some other non-

alcoholic beverage with each alcoholic one you drink. Don't drink and drive. You may think you're "okay" but don't drive if you've had more than one drink.

Plan your spending budget according to your available funds rather than what you "wish" you could spend. Getting extra jobs for the sole purpose of overspending only increases stress. Give the gift of your time, make something inexpensive, or offer a friend babysitting for a date night out instead. Plan free outings with the kids, or a family game night where the kids choose the activity, rather than stockpiling material gifts.

Enlist all members of the family to prepare for the holiday celebrations. Decorating, shopping, baking, gift wrapping and entertaining can create an exhausting schedule so make sure to ask for help and pace yourself.

Pick and choose carefully among the many obligations that present themselves, even the fun ones. Maintain a regular sleep schedule and practice healthy sleep habits. Keep in mind that alcohol actually disrupts the sleep cycle even when it seems like it helps you get to sleep.

Do your best to get some

Learn more with Dr. Benson

The ABCs of Stress Management

This 2-hour workshop will give you practical stress management tools from relaxation techniques to challenging stressful thoughts. Plan to participate; this is an interactive class! Offered through Orono Community Education on Monday, January 28, 2013 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Spring brochures will be available soon.

Making the Connection Work: Using the Language Your Kids Love.

This 1 ½ hour workshop is appropriate for parents, teachers or child caregivers. Learn more about the building blocks of relationships, how to best respond to children's attempts to connect and to use their own preferred style for showing and receiving love. Offered through Orono Community Education on Monday, April 15, 2013 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. Spring brochures will be available soon.