
SEASONAL

The Holiday Survival Guide

Navigating family expectations, financial pressure, and stress without losing your mind or your marriage.

Boundary Agreement Resource Library

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This guide is a coaching resource, not therapy or counseling.

Holidays Break Marriages

Thanksgiving through New Year's is the most stressful season for couples. Family obligations, financial pressure, unrealistic expectations, alcohol, crowded houses, and the myth that everything should be magical. More couples file for divorce in January than any other month. The holiday season is often the breaking point.

Make a plan BEFORE the season.

Where are you going? For how long? What is the budget? Who is hosting? Decide in October, not December. Last-minute decisions cause fights.

Set a holiday budget.

Write down a number. Stick to it. Do not go into debt for gifts. Nobody needs a \$500 present. They need a present partner who is not stressed about the credit card bill in January.

Alternate families fairly.

If you always go to one family's house and never the other, resentment builds. Create a rotation or split the day. Communicate the plan to both families together.

Protect alone time.

You do not have to attend every event. It is okay to say no. Build in at least one evening during the holiday season that is just the two of you.

Manage alcohol.

Holiday gatherings plus alcohol plus family tension equals explosions. Know your limits. Watch your partner's limits. Have a plan for when things get heated.

Lower expectations.

The holidays will not look like a movie. The kids will melt down. Someone will say something offensive at dinner. The turkey might burn. Let go of perfection and aim for presence.

EXERCISE: The Holiday Plan

Fill this out together in October/November.

Thanksgiving plan (where, how long, who is coming):

Christmas/holiday plan:

Total holiday budget: \$____

Gift budget per person: \$____

Events we will attend:

Events we will skip:

Our protected couple time:

Our exit strategy when things get stressful:
