



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/holidays-family-gatherings>

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K-State aging expert shares tips for positive family get-togethers during the holidays

Martinez says having the right attitude is an important first step

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The holidays are for young and old and everyone in between. That is also what can make getting together particularly challenging for families.

“Yes, it can be stressful; and yes, you may see people that you don’t necessarily have the greatest relationship with,” said Erin Martinez, a specialist on aging for K-State Research and Extension.

But families do get together, and families do have positive and uplifting holidays. Martinez said a first step is approaching holiday get-togethers with a positive attitude.

“If you go into holiday get-togethers with a positive attitude, you’re going to be more happy and healthy and you’re just going to enjoy yourself, which will make the day or the week or however long you’re with your family a lot better,” she said.

Martinez said when a person is stressed or worried – whether that be about family relationships or other matters – they may not sleep well, or make poor food choices and not make time for exercise. Starting with a positive attitude can change all that, she said.

“Really, that’s my No. 1 tip: Have a positive attitude,” she said. “When you’re going into these multi-generational holiday gatherings, go into it with a positive attitude and be ready to have fun and truly enjoy each other’s company.”

Some additional tips for keeping the ‘happy’ in this year’s holidays include:

Play, play, play

“Research and life experience shows us that people of all ages are happier and healthier when we play together and when we participate in family leisure activities together,” Martinez said.

She notes that play time as family equates to bonding time, which opens the door to exciting, new family holiday traditions.

“This doesn’t have to be some sort of structured activity, or anything that costs a lot of money,” Martinez said. “It could be something as simple as gathering your board games from your house and taking them over to where the party is being held.”

More ideas: Card games, ugly sweater competition, white elephant gifts, a canned food drive for the local shelter or a neighborhood scavenger hunt.

“When you play together, it creates family bonds,” Martinez said. “People are more healthy and happy and it just creates an overall better environment.”

Communicate in advance with all family members

Martinez said families should be well aware of such things as when the main dinner will be held, when the turkey (or other main dish) needs to go in the oven, evening activities and similar plans.

“It’s really important to talk about what sort of activities and ideas you had in mind before the party starts, so that everyone can be prepared and know what to expect,” she said.

If there are family members dealing with health issues – such as dementia, Parkinson’s Disease or other – it’s important that others have an idea beforehand what they can expect from those family members.

Martinez said: “It’s really important that the family knows what’s going on, how that individual is currently managing, and the current stage of their disease, so that everyone’s prepared.

“It’s especially important to talk to young children about that, because the grandma and grandpa that they saw last Christmas or at Easter or some other time of year may not be the grandma or grandpa that they’re going to be seeing now.”

Build in some structure to family time

Not everything has to be planned, but having some plans for activities that people might want to engage in “is a really good start,” according to Martinez.

“I’ve heard of people sort of sectioning their house into different zones,” Martinez said. “So in one area of the house, they’ll have a movie zone. If you’re ready for some quiet time and you just want to watch a movie and relax, you can go into that room. If you want to play board games, you go into the kitchen table and everyone’s gathered around there playing board games and card games and those types of things. And if you want to engage in more physical activities, maybe everyone goes down to the basement where they’re playing soccer or football, or something as safely as they can down in the basement.”

She also suggests giving people an opportunity to get away. “Not all of us are extroverts and want to be talking with people and engaged with people all day. So it’s really important to think about just giving people an opportunity to have some space for themselves.”

Martinez suggests making certain rooms available for naps, not just for the young or old, but for any member of the family.

A more detailed conversation with Martinez is available on [the weekly radio program, Sound Living](#), produced by K-State Research and Extension. More information about aging and related issues is available through [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

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Sound Living, <https://soundlivingksu.libsyn.com>

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

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