

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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Holiday Party “Opportunities”

Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the “silly season” in the United States, and it also marks the beginning of added social pressure for couples. No matter what faith tradition they come from, couples can expect to be involved in multiple parties or social gatherings between now and the New Year. Sometimes these opportunities can become overwhelming. And, for couples with non-traditional family structures, these opportunities can become very complicated logistically. Imagine the following hypothetical situation: You and your spouse have been married for several years and have two children together. Then imagine that both you and your spouse were married previously and that both of you had at least one child each by your previous spouse. Next imagine that your ex-spouse and your wife’s ex-spouse have both remarried and one or both have had more children. Now imagine that your parents are divorced and both have remarried and your spouse’s parents are divorced and both have remarried. Then imagine that all four of these new spouses, that your parents and in-laws have married, also have children and possibly grandchildren. Finally, imagine trying to coordinate your holiday schedule with all of these folks. It is maddening! It may sound outlandish, but family structures like this are more common than you may think. And, coordinating a holiday social schedule around these parameters may seem unfair, if not impossible.

Parties and social gatherings are not limited to family and friends either, as many companies host holiday parties in which employees feel obligated (or sometimes even required) to attend. Then, you can also throw into the mix family birthdays which fall in November and December. Personally, in my family, we have five birthdays between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve, including my own. Though this time of year can be overwhelming, I am going to offer up some tips that will help you not only “get through it” but also help you enjoy it. The first tip is to begin thinking of these social events as “opportunities” rather than “obligations.” This is a simple thought restructuring technique which should help put yourself and your spouse in a better frame of mind during the holidays. I almost titled the newsletter “Holiday Party Obligations,” but it occurred to me that this would set a negative tone for the newsletter. So, please view these social events as an opportunity to share experiences with family and friends instead of an obligation to be dreaded. If you are a couple with young children, then you could even use a holiday party as an opportunity for a child free date night, provided you can find a babysitter. The next tip is to set some boundaries for yourself and allow yourself to say “no” to some of these opportunities. This is a simple assertiveness technique which should help you free up some time for yourself and your spouse during the holidays. In general, folks tend to overdo it during the holidays, so try to lower your social expectations for yourself and your spouse during this hectic time of year!

- Try to think of holiday social events as opportunities rather than obligations.
- For young parents, try to seize an opportunity or two for a child free date night.
- Set some social boundaries for yourself and remember it is OK to say “no” to social invites.

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