Ready or not, here comes the holidays. Perhaps you are already feeling some added pressure now that the leaves have fallen from the trees and you begin to remember, all too well, the increased responsibilities of holidays past.

We, at Elliot Behavioral Health Services, would like to offer you some simple tips to help you enjoy the spirit of the season before it becomes Christmas past.

**PLAN AHEAD**

Make a list of those things you feel you should do. Review the list and for each item add, ask yourself what is likely to happen if you don’t do it. Unless it will clearly have a negative impact, move the item to the “I’ll-do-it-if-time-allows” list.

Decide what you can realistically spend so you do not incur a debt with accumulating interest to pay off.

Within your extended family, draw names and buy just one nice gift for the person whose name you get. Feel free to ask family for suggestions; both giver and receiver will be happy knowing it really is the perfect gift!

**LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS**

Eliminate all those thoughts about what the “perfect holiday” should be. Remember that those beautifully decorated homes, the tables laden with picture-perfect foods are really just that, picture perfect. Unless you have a full staff of professionals at your service, such perfection is rarely, if ever, achieved outside the pages of House and Garden.

It is not necessary to keep every tradition yearly. Identify the ones that mean the most to you and your family. Next year you can swap one you celebrated this year for one you set aside.

If you and your family struggle with issues during the year, do not expect that your time together during the holidays will be more like a Norman Rockwell painting. Try to steer away from sensitive topics. Do your best to remember the spirit of the season.

**BE KIND TO YOURSELF**

Do not feel obliged to accept every invitation you receive. An extra party or two every week for a month can add strain to a schedule already on overload with extra tasks such as shopping, wrapping, decorating and entertaining.

Suggest swapping childcare responsibilities with a friend; offer to watch her children while she has the morning to shop and she can do the same for you.

It is unrealistic to think that the holidays will fill your heart with limitless joy and love just as your responsibilities increase. When you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or increasingly irritable, take a break! The 15 minutes you sit quietly and focus on three things for which you are most grateful, will likely revive your energy and your spirit so that you may find it possible to continue with the task at hand.

_Wishing you a holiday season filled with the simple joy of peace!_